ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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Murder on New Year's Eve

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"Extra! Extra!"

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The Hands of Mr. Ottermole

Kill and Tell

JANUARY

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AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

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GET HIM OUT OF THIS

by ERNEST DUDLEY

The Problem of the Octopus Room

The priceless Giles oil-painting, "Sunset at Dawn," has vanished from millionaire oil-man Derek Drillman's lavish Texas hacienda. Fearless, quick-thinking Snip Carton, Insurance Agent, is assigned to the case. From the dying words of a desert rat, he gets the clue which leads him to Paris on the trail of the international felon and smuggler, Pepi L'Apache. In Paris, he hurries to No. 13, Rue Morgue, knocks three times, and asks for his old flame and stool pigeon, Frou-Frou. Frou-Frou is a dancer at the Folies Rogue, but, unknown to Snip, she has become Pepi L'Apache's newest *amour*. She overpowers Snip Carton with her perfume and sends for Pepi. Snip Carton recovers consciousness to find himself dumped in the sinister Octopus Room at the top of No. 13, Rue Morgue. The room is steel-lined, except for one wall which consists of a glass tank containing a monstrous, man-eating octopus. Poison-gas is already seeping through gratings in the floor, and in the corner, just to make sure, Pepi has left a bomb. The fuse is burning—closer and closer. . . .

So there's Snip Carton, Insurance Agent, in a steel-lined room of doom, faced once again with a horrible death—unless you Get Him Out Of This! When—and if—you have solved Snip Carton's desperate problem, turn to page 110 for the true story of how our hero escaped.

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Solved by Ellery Queen!

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XMAS MARKS THE SPOT

Bennett Cerf, publisher, raconteur, bon-vivant, and the most jovial Joe Miller of our times, told this Christmas chronicle in the "Chicago Sunday Tribune" of December 7, 1947:

'Twas the afternoon before Christmas (said the compiler of TRY AND STOP ME *and* SHAKE WELL BEFORE USING) *and all through Random House not a creature was stirring anything but a bowl of potent eggnog . . . The last customer had been sent packing (by the shipping department). The bosses, the bookkeepers, the designers gathered happily around the festive board . . .*

Into this merry family group a stranger entered suddenly. It was an author — a lady who wrote detective stories . . . "I came to tell you the plot of my new murder novel," she said sweetly to the three bosses, who were genuflecting prettily [this is a Christmas fantasy]. "But don't let me disturb you all on Christmas Eve. My plot will wait — five minutes, anyhow."

The purposeful glance she threw in the direction of Doubleday's, down the block, was not lost on the partners, who hurried the lady detective-story writer to a private room and chorused: "Tell us at once! We know it will be wonderful!"

"Well," said the authoress with a sigh of contentment, "it starts with the murder of a husband by his jealous wife. She lures him to the bridge which spans a mighty river nearby, stabs him with a hatpin, and watches his body disappear beneath the swirling waters with a satisfying plop. Then she seeks sanctuary with her old mammy, twenty miles away. She has left no clue whatever. She thinks she is absolutely safe."

The authoress paused, sipped some liquid refreshment, then continued:

"She has not reckoned, however, with Mother Nature. That very evening there is a terrible flood. The mighty river rises, rises — and finally overflows its banks."

The lady author paused again, this time for applause. But the publishers looked even blanker than usual.

"What's the point?" asked one finally.

"Don't you see, you silly oafs?" cried the authoress. "This is the first time in all the annals of detective fiction that the scene of the crime returns to the murderer!"

Our Christmas story this year comes from the talented typewriter of Stanley Ellin, whose two previous tales in EQMM — "The Specialty of the House" and "The Cat's-Paw" — were memorable murder-pieces.

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"Peace on earth, good will toward men" is not the underlying theme of Mr. Ellin's work. As a matter of fact, Mr. Ellin's third story reveals that he has become increasingly interested in a certain basic idea. No, we won't tell you the nature of Mr. Ellin's 'tec thesis — we leave you to discover it for yourself . . .

Merry Christmas!

DEATH ON CHRISTMAS EVE

by STANLEY ELLIN

As a child I had been vastly impressed by the Boerum house. It was fairly new then, and glossy; a gigantic pile of Victorian rickrack, fretwork, and stained glass flung together in such chaotic profusion that it was hard to encompass in one glance. Standing before it this early Christmas Eve, however, I could find no echo of that youthful impression. The gloss was long since gone; woodwork, glass, metal, all were merged to a dreary gray, and the shades behind the windows were drawn completely so that the house seemed to present a dozen blindly staring eyes to the passerby.

When I rapped my stick sharply on the door, Celia opened it.

"There is a doorbell right at hand," she said. She was still wearing the long outmoded and badly wrinkled black dress she must have dragged from her mother's trunk, and she looked, more than ever, the image of old Katrin in her later years: the scrawny body, the tightly compressed lips, the colorless hair drawn back hard enough to pull every wrinkle out of her forehead. She reminded me of a steel trap ready to snap down on anyone who touched her incautiously.

I said, "I am aware that the doorbell has been disconnected, Celia," and walked past her into the hallway. Without turning my head, I knew that she was glaring at me; then she sniffed once, hard and dry, and flung the door shut. Instantly we were in a murky dimness that made the smell of dry rot about me stick in my throat. I fumbled for the wall switch, but Celia said sharply, "No! This is not the time for lights."

I turned to the white blur of her face which was all I could see of her. "Celia," I said, "spare me the dramatics."

"There has been a death in this house. You know that."

"I have good reason to," I said, "but your performance now does not impress me."

"She was my own brother's wife. She was very dear to me."

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I took a step toward her in the murk and rested my stick on her shoulder. "Celia," I said, "as your family's lawyer, let me give you a word of advice. The inquest is over and done with, and you've been cleared. But nobody believed a word of your precious sentiments then, and nobody ever will. Keep that in mind, Celia."

She jerked away so sharply that the stick almost fell from my hand. "Is that what you have come to tell me?" she said.

I said, "I came because I knew your brother would want to see me today. And if you don't mind my saying so, I suggest that you keep to yourself while I talk to him. I don't want any scenes."

"Then keep away from him yourself!" she cried. "He was at the inquest. He saw them clear my name. In a little while he will forget the evil he thinks of me. Keep away from him so that he can forget."

She was at her infuriating worst, and to break the spell I started up the dark stairway, one hand warily on the balustrade. But I heard her follow eagerly behind, and in some eerie way it seemed as if she were not addressing me, but answering the groaning of the stairs under our feet.

"When he comes to me," she said, "I will forgive him. At first I was not sure, but now I know. I prayed for guidance, and I was told that life is too short for hatred. So when he comes to me I will forgive him."

I reached the head of the stairway and almost went sprawling. I swore in annoyance as I righted myself. "If you're not going to use lights, Celia, you should, at least, keep the way clear. Why don't you get that stuff out of here?"

"Ah," she said; "those are all poor Jessie's belongings. It hurts Charlie so to see anything of hers, I knew this would be the best thing to do — to throw all her things out."

Then a note of alarm entered her voice. "But you won't tell Charlie, will you? You won't tell him?" she said, and kept repeating it on a higher and higher note as I moved away from her, so that when I entered Charlie's room and closed the door behind me it almost sounded as if I had left a bat chittering behind me.

As in the rest of the house, the shades in Charlie's room were drawn to their full length. But a single bulb in the chandelier overhead dazzled me momentarily, and I had to look twice before I saw Charlie sprawled out on his bed with an arm flung over his eyes. Then he slowly came to his feet and peered at me.

"Well," he said at last, nodding toward the door, "she didn't give you any light to come up, did she?"

"No," I said, "but I know the way."

"She's like a mole," he said. "Gets around better in the dark than I do in the light. She'd rather have it that way too. Otherwise she might look into a mirror and be scared of what she sees there."

"Yes," I said, "she seems to be taking it very hard."

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He laughed short and sharp as a sea-lion barking. "That's because she's still got the fear in her. All you get out of her now is how she loved Jessie, and how sorry she is. Maybe she figures if she says it enough, people might get to believe it. But give her a little time and she'll be the same old Celia again."

I dropped my hat and stick on the bed and laid my overcoat beside them. Then I drew out a cigar and waited until he fumbled for a match and helped me to a light. His hand shook so violently that he had hard going for a moment and muttered angrily at himself. Then I slowly exhaled a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling, and waited.

Charlie was Celia's junior by five years, but seeing him then it struck me that he looked a dozen years older. His hair was the same pale blond, almost colorless so that it was hard to tell if it was graying or not. But his cheeks wore a fine, silvery stubble, and there were huge blue-black pouches under his eyes. And where Celia was braced against a rigid and uncompromising backbone, Charlie sagged, standing or sitting, as if he were on the verge of falling forward. He stared at me and tugged uncertainly at the limp mustache that dropped past the corners of his mouth.

"You know what I wanted to see you about, don't you?" he said.

"I can imagine," I said, "but I'd rather have you tell me."

"I'll put it to you straight," he said. "It's Celia. I want to see her get what's coming to her. Not jail. I want the law to take her and kill her, and I want to be there to watch it."

A large ash dropped to the floor, and I ground it carefully into the rug with my foot. I said, "You were at the inquest, Charlie; you saw what happened. Celia's cleared, and unless additional evidence can be produced, she stays cleared."

"Evidence! My God, what more evidence does anyone need! They were arguing hammer and tongs at the top of the stairs. Celia just grabbed Jessie and threw her down to the bottom and killed her. That's murder, isn't it? Just the same as if she used a gun or poison or whatever she would have used if the stairs weren't handy?"

I sat down wearily in the old leather-bound armchair there, and studied the new ash that was forming on my cigar. "Let me show it to you from the legal angle," I said, and the monotone of my voice must have made it sound like a well memorized formula. "First, there were no witnesses."

"I heard Jessie scream and I heard her fall," he said doggedly, "and when I ran out and found her there, I heard Celia slam her door shut right then. She pushed Jessie and then scuttered like a rat to be out of the way."

"But you didn't *see* anything. And since Celia claims that she wasn't on the scene, there were no witnesses. In other words, Celia's story cancels out your story, and since you weren't an eye witness you can't very well

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make a murder out of what might have been an accident."

He slowly shook his head.

"You don't believe that," he said. "You don't really believe that. Because if you do, you can get out now and never come near me again."

"It doesn't matter what I believe; I'm showing you the legal aspects of the case. What about motivation? What did Celia have to gain from Jessie's death? Certainly there's no money or property involved; she's as financially independent as you are."

Charlie sat down on the edge of his bed and leaned toward me with his hands resting on his knees. "No," he whispered, "there's no money or property in it."

I spread my arms helplessly. "You see?"

"But you know what it is," he said; "it's me. First, it was the old lady with her heart trouble any time I tried to call my soul my own. Then when she died and I thought I was free, it was Celia. From the time I got up in the morning until I went to bed at night, it was Celia every step of the way. She never had a husband or a baby — but she had me!"

I said quietly, "She's your sister, Charlie. She loves you," and he laughed that same unpleasant, short laugh.

"She loves me like ivy loves a tree. When I think back now, I still can't see how she did it, but she would just look at me a certain way and all the strength would go out of me. And it was like that until I met Jessie . . . I remember the day I brought Jessie home, and told Celia we were married. She swallowed it, but that look was in her eyes the same as it must have been when she pushed Jessie down those stairs."

I said, "But you admitted at the inquest that you never saw her threaten Jessie or do anything to hurt her."

"Of course I never *saw!* But when Jessie would go around sick to her heart every day and not say a word, or cry in bed every night and not tell me why, I knew damn well what was going on. You know what Jessie was like. She wasn't so smart or pretty, but she was good-hearted as the day was long, and she was crazy about me. And when she started losing all that sparkle in her after only a month, I knew why. I talked to her and I talked to Celia, and both of them just shook their heads. All I could do was go around in circles, but when it happened, when I saw Jessie lying there, it didn't surprise me. Maybe that sounds queer, but it didn't surprise me at all."

"I don't think it surprised anyone who knows Celia," I said, "but you can't make a case out of that."

He beat his fist against his knee and rocked from side to side. "What can I do?" he said. "That's what I need you for — to tell me what to do. All my life I never got around to doing anything because of her. That's what she's banking on now — that I won't do anything, and that she'll get away with it. Then after a while,

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things'll settle down, and we'll be right back where we started from."

I said, "Charlie, you're getting yourself all worked up to no end."

He stood up and stared at the door, and then at me. "But I can do something," he whispered. "Do you know what?"

He waited with the bright expectancy of one who has asked a clever riddle that he knows will stump the listener. I stood up facing him, and shook my head slowly. "No," I said; "whatever you're thinking, put it out of your mind."

"Don't mix me up," he said. "You know you can get away with murder if you're as smart as Celia. Don't you think I'm as smart as Celia?"

I caught his shoulders tightly. "For God's sake, Charlie," I said, "don't start talking like that."

He pulled out of my hands and went staggering back against the wall. His eyes were bright, and his teeth showed behind his drawn lips. "What should I do?" he cried. "Forget everything now that Jessie is dead and buried? Sit here until Celia gets tired of being afraid of me and kills me too?"

My years and girth had betrayed me in that little tussle with him, and I found myself short of dignity and breath. "I'll tell you one thing," I said. "You haven't been out of this house since the inquest. It's about time you got out, if only to walk the streets and look around you."

"And have everybody laugh at me as I go!"

"Try it," I said, "and see. Al Sharp said that some of your friends would be at his bar and grill tonight, and he'd like to see you there. That's my advice—for whatever it's worth."

"It's not worth anything," said Celia. The door had been opened, and she stood there rigid, her eyes narrowed against the light in the room. Charlie turned toward her, the muscles of his jaw knotting and unknotting.

"Celia," he said, "I told you never to come into this room!"

Her face remained impassive. "I'm not *in* it. I came to tell you that your dinner is ready."

He took a menacing step toward her. "Did you have your ear at that door long enough to hear everything I said? Or should I repeat it for you?"

"I heard an ungodly and filthy thing," she said quietly; "an invitation to drink and roister while this house is in mourning. I think I have every right to object to that."

He looked at her incredulously and had to struggle for words. "Celia," he said, "tell me you don't mean that! Only the blackest hypocrite alive or someone insane could say what you've just said, and mean it."

That struck a spark in her. "Insane!" she cried. "*You* dare use that word? Locked in your room, talking to yourself, thinking heaven knows what!" She turned to me suddenly. "You've talked to him. You ought to know. Is it possible that —"

"He is as sane as you, Celia," I said heavily.

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"Then he should know that one doesn't drink in saloons at a time like this. How could you ask him to do it?"

She flung the question at me with such an air of malicious triumph that I completely forgot myself. "If you weren't preparing to throw out Jessie's belongings, Celia, I would take that question seriously!"

It was a reckless thing to say, and I had instant cause to regret it. Before I could move, Charlie was past me and had Celia's arms pinned in a paralyzing grip.

"Did you dare go into her room?" he raged, shaking her savagely. "Tell me!" and then, getting an immediate answer from the panic in her face, he dropped her arms as if they were red hot, and stood there sagging with his head bowed.

Celia reached out a placating hand toward him. "Charlie," she whimpered, "don't you see? Having her things around bothers you. I only wanted to help you."

"Where are her things?"

"By the stairs, Charlie. Everything is there."

He started down the hallway, and with the sound of his uncertain footsteps moving away I could feel my heartbeat slowing down to its normal tempo. Celia turned to look at me, and there was such a raging hatred in her face that I knew only a desperate need to get out of that house at once. I took my things from the bed and started past her, but she barred the door.

"Do you see what you've done?" she whispered hoarsely. "Now I will have to pack them all over again. It tires me, but I will have to pack them all over again — just because of you."

"That is entirely up to you, Celia," I said coldly.

"You," she said. "You old fool. It should have been you along with her when I —"

I dropped my stick sharply on her shoulder and could feel her wince under it. "As your lawyer, Celia," I said, "I advise you to exercise your tongue only during your sleep, when you can't be held accountable for what you say."

She said no more, but I made sure she stayed safely in front of me until I was out in the street again.

From the Boerum house to Al Sharp's Bar and Grill was only a few minutes' walk, and I made it in good time, grateful for the sting of the clear winter air in my face. Al was alone behind the bar, busily polishing glasses, and when he saw me enter he greeted me cheerfully. "Merry Christmas, counsellor," he said.

"Same to you," I said, and watched him place a comfortable-looking bottle and a pair of glasses on the bar.

"You're regular as the seasons, counsellor," said Al, pouring out two stiff ones. "I was expecting you along right about now."

We drank to each other and Al leaned confidingly on the bar. "Just come from there?"

"Yes," I said.

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"See Charlie?"

"And Celia," I said.

"Well," said Al, "that's nothing exceptional. I've seen her too when she comes by to do some shopping. Runs along with her head down and that black shawl over it like she was being chased by something. I guess she is at that."

"I guess she is," I said.

"But Charlie, he's the one. Never see him around at all. Did you tell him I'd like to see him some time?"

"Yes," I said. "I told him."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing. Celia said it was wrong for him to come here while he was in mourning."

Al whistled softly and expressively, and twirled a forefinger at his forehead. "Tell me," he said, "do you think it's safe for them to be alone together like they are? I mean, the way things stand, and the way Charlie feels, there could be another case of trouble there."

"It looked like it for a while tonight," I said. "But it blew over."

"Until next time," said Al.

"I'll be there," I said.

Al looked at me and shook his head. "Nothing changes in that house," he said. "Nothing at all. That's why you can figure out all the answers in advance. That's how I knew you'd be standing here right about now talking to me about it."

I could still smell the dry rot of the house in my nostrils, and I knew it would take days before I could get it out of my clothes.

"This is one day I'd like to cut out of the calendar permanently," I said.

"And leave them alone to their troubles. It would serve them right."

"They're not alone," I said. "Jessie is with them. Jessie will always be with them until that house and everything in it is gone."

Al frowned. "It's the queerest thing that ever happened in this town, all right. The house all black, her running through the streets like something hunted, him lying there in that room with only the walls to look at, for — when was it Jessie took that fall, counsellor?"

By shifting my eyes a little I could see in the mirror behind Al the reflection of my own face: ruddy, deep jowled, a little incredulous.

"Twenty years ago," I heard myself saying. "Just twenty years ago tonight."

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Margery Allingham paid her first visit to America nearly a year ago, and in an interview to Harvey Breit of "The New York Times Book Review" she revealed that the author she'd "most like to write like is Robert Louis Stevenson. He writes very simply," said Margery Allingham. "Anyone who reads him has got to understand all of it, and to see all the beauty, however clever one may be, or however silly. That, to my mind, is perfection. The day I get to write like that, I'll send you a balloon."

Let Mr. Breit have the balloon — we'd prefer the story; and we hope that it turns out to be a Mr. Albert Campion adventure about a Young Man who did not know whether he preferred Holy Orders or Cream Tarts, but in order to find out engaged two Hansom Cabs, one to transport his Saratoga Trunk, the other to bring him to the House with the Green Blinds, where he met, among others, a Physician, a Detective, and of course, Prince Florizel . . .

THE SAME TO US

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

IT WAS particularly unfortunate for Mrs. Christopher Molesworth that she should have had burglars on the Sunday night of what was, perhaps, the crowningly triumphant weekend of her career as a hostess.

As a hostess Mrs. Molesworth was a connoisseur. She chose her guests with a nice discrimination, disdaining everything but the most rare. Mere notoriety was no passport to Molesworth Court.

Nor did mere friendship obtain many crumbs from the Molesworth table, though the ability to please and do one's piece might possibly earn one a bed when the lion of the hour promised to be dull, uncomfortable, and liable to be bored.

That was how young Petterboy came to be there. He was diplomatic, presentable, near enough a teetotaler to be absolutely trustworthy, even at the end of the evening, and he spoke a little Chinese.

This last accomplishment had done him but little good before, save with very young debutantes at parties, who relieved their discomfort at having no conversation by persuading him to tell them how to ask for their baggage to be taken ashore at Hong Kong, or to ascertain the way to the bathroom at a Peking hotel.

However, now the accomplishment was really useful, for it obtained for him an invitation to Mrs. Molesworth's greatest weekend party.

This party was so select that it numbered but eight all told. There were the Molesworths themselves — Christopher Molesworth was an M.P.,

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rode to hounds, and backed up his wife in much the same way as a decent black frame backs up a colored print.

Then there were Petterboy himself, the Feison brothers, who looked so restful and talked only if necessary, and finally the guest of all time, the gem of a magnificent collection, the catch of a lifetime, Dr. Koo Fin, the Chinese scientist himself — Dr. Koo Fin, the Einstein of the East, the man with the Theory.

Mrs. Molesworth had every reason to congratulate herself on her capture. "The Chinese Einstein," as the newspapers had nicknamed him, was hardly a social bird. His shyness was proverbial, as was also his dislike and mistrust of women. It was this last foible which accounted for the absence of femininity at Mrs. Molesworth's party. Her own presence was unavoidable, of course, but she wore her severest gowns, and took a mental vow to speak as little as necessary. It is quite conceivable that had Mrs. Molesworth been able to change her sex she would have done so nobly for that one weekend alone.

She had met the sage at a very select supper-party after his only lecture in London. It was that same lecture which had thrown London into a state of bewilderment. Since Dr. Koo Fin had arrived he had been photographed more often than any film star. His name and his round Chinese face were better known than those of the principals in the latest *cause célèbre*, and already music-hall comedians referred to his great "objectivity" theory in their routines.

Apart from that one lecture, however, and, of course, the supper-party after it, he had been seen nowhere else save in his own closely guarded suite in his hotel.

How Mrs. Molesworth got herself invited to the supper-party, and how, once there, she persuaded the sage to consent to visit Molesworth Court, is one of those minor miracles which do sometimes occur. Her enemies — and how these clever women with hospitality mania do dislike one another — made many unworthy conjectures, but, since the university professors in charge of the proceedings on that occasion were not likely to have been corrupted by money or love, it is probable that Mrs. Molesworth moved the mountain by faith in herself alone.

The guest-chamber prepared for Dr. Koo Fin was the third room in the west wing. This architectural monstrosity contained four bedrooms, each furnished with French windows leading onto the same balcony.

Young Petterboy occupied the room at the end of the row. It was one of the best in the house, as a matter of fact, but had no bathroom attached, since Mrs. Molesworth, who had the second chamber, had converted it into a gigantic clothes press. After all, as she said, it was her own house.

Dr. Koo Fin duly arrived on the Saturday by train, like any lesser person. He shook hands with Mrs. Moles-

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worth and Christopher and young Petterboy and the Feisons as if he actually shared their own intelligence, and smiled at them all in his bland, utterly-too Chinese way.

From the first moment he was a tremendous success. He ate little, drank less, spoke not at all, but he nodded appreciatively at young Petterboy's halting Cantonese, and grunted once or twice most charmingly when someone inadvertently addressed him in English. Altogether he was Mrs. Molesworth's conception of a perfect guest.

On the Sunday morning Mrs. Molesworth actually received a compliment from him, and saw herself in a giddy flash the most talked-of woman of the cocktail parties of the coming week.

The charming incident occurred just before lunch. The sage rose abruptly from his chair on the lawn, and as the whole house party watched him with awe, anxious not to miss a single recountable incident, he stalked boldly across the nearest flower-bed, trampling violas and London Pride with the true dreamer's magnificent disregard for physical obstacles, and, plucking the head off a huge rose from Christopher's favorite standard, trampled back with it in triumph and laid it in Mrs. Molesworth's lap.

Then, as she sat in ecstasy, he returned quietly to his seat and considered her affably. For the first time in her life Mrs. Molesworth was really thrilled. She told a number of people so afterwards.

However, on the Sunday night there were the burglars. It was sickeningly awkward. Mrs. Molesworth had a diamond star, two sets of earrings, a bracelet, and five rings, all set in platinum, and she kept them in a little wall safe under a picture in her bedroom. On the Sunday night, after the rose incident, she gave up the self-effacement program and came down to dinner in full warpaint. The Molesworths always dressed on Sunday — the servants never went to church anyway — and she certainly looked devastatingly feminine, all blue mist and diamonds.

It was the more successful evening of the two. The sage revealed an engaging talent for making card houses, and he also played five-finger exercises on the piano. The great simplicity of the man was never better displayed. Finally, dazed, honored, and happy, the house party went to bed.

Mrs. Molesworth was so delighted that she dismissed her maid and prepared to disrobe alone. She removed her jewelry and placed it in the safe, but unfortunately did not lock it at once. Instead, she discovered that she had dropped an earring, and went down to look for it in the drawing-room. When at last she returned without it the safe was empty. It really was devastatingly awkward, and the resourceful Christopher, hastily summoned from his room in the main wing, confessed himself in a quandary.

The servants, discreetly roused, whispered that they had heard noth-

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ing and gave unimpeachable alibis. There remained the guests. Mrs. Molesworth wept. For such a thing to happen at any time was terrible enough, but for it to occur on such an occasion was more than she could bear. One thing she and Christopher agreed: the sage must never guess, must never dream . . .

There remained the Feisons and the unfortunate young Petterboy. The Feisons were ruled out almost at once. From the fact that the window-catch in Mrs. Molesworth's room was burst, it was fairly obvious that the thief had entered from the balcony; therefore, had either of the Feisons passed that way from their rooms, they would have had to pass the sage, who slept with his window wide. So there was only young Petterboy. It seemed fairly obvious. He was notoriously broke, and had not come from a very good school.

Finally, after a great deal of consultation, Christopher went to speak to him as man to man, and came back fifteen minutes later hot and uncommunicative.

Mrs. Molesworth dried her eyes, put on her newest négligée, and, sweeping aside her fears and her husband's objections, went in to speak to young Petterboy like a mother. Poor young Petterboy gave up laughing at her after ten minutes, suddenly got angry, and demanded that the sage should be asked if he had "heard anything" too. Then he vulgarly suggested sending for the police.

Mrs. Molesworth nearly lost her head, recovered herself in time, apologized by innuendo, and crept back disconsolately to Christopher and bed.

In the morning poor young Petterboy cornered his hostess and repeated his requests of the night before. But the sage was departing by the 11:12, and Mrs. Molesworth was driving him to the station. In that moment of her triumph the diamonds seemed relatively unimportant to Elvira Molesworth, who had inherited the Cribbage fortune a year before. Indeed, she kissed poor young Petterboy and said it really didn't matter, and hadn't they had a wonderful, wonderful weekend? And that he must come down again some time soon.

The Feisons said goodbye to the sage, and as Mrs. Molesworth was going with him, made their adieux to her as well. As the formalities had been accomplished there seemed no point in staying, and Christopher saw them off in their car, with poor young Petterboy leading the way in his.

As he was standing on the lawn waving somewhat perfunctorily to the departing cars, the second post arrived. One letter for his wife bore the crest of Dr. Koo Fin's hotel, and Christopher, with one of those intuitions which made him such a successful husband, tore it open.

It was quite short, but in the circumstances wonderfully enlightening.

Dear Madam,

In going through Dr. Koo Fin's memoranda, I find to my horror that

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he promised to visit you this weekend. I know you will forgive Dr. Koo Fin when you hear that he never takes part in social occasions. As you know, his arduous work occupies his entire time. I know it is inexcusable of me not to have let you known before now, but it is only a moment since I discovered that the doctor made the engagement.

I do hope his absence has not put you to any inconvenience, and that you will pardon this atrocious slip.

I have the honor to remain, Madam,
Yours most apologetically,
Lo Pei Fu, Secretary.

P.S. The doctor should have written himself, but, as you know, his English is not good. He begs to be reminded to you and hopes for your forgiveness.

As Christopher raised his eyes from the note, his wife returned. She stopped the car in the drive and came running across the green lawn towards him.

"Darling, wasn't it wonderful?" she said, throwing herself into his arms with an abandonment she did not often display to him. "What's in the post?" she went on, disengaging herself.

Christopher slipped the letter he had been reading into his pocket with unobtrusive skill.

"Nothing, my dear," he said gallantly. "Nothing at all." He was amazingly fond of his wife.

Mrs. Molesworth wrinkled her white forehead.

"Darling," she said, "now about my jewelry. Wasn't it too odious for such a thing to happen when that dear sweet old man was here? What shall we do?"

Christopher drew her arm through his own. "I think, my dear," he said firmly, "you'd better leave all that to me. We mustn't have a scandal."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Molesworth, her eyes growing round with alarm. "Oh, no, that would spoil everything."

In a reserved first-class compartment on the 11:12 to London the elderly Chinese turned over the miscellaneous collection of jewelry which lay in a large silk handkerchief on his knee. His smile was child-like, bland, and faintly wondering. After a while he folded the handkerchief over its treasure and placed the package in his breast pocket.

Then he leaned back against the upholstery and looked out of the window. The green undulating landscape was pleasant. The fields were neat and well tilled. The sky was blue, the sunlight beautiful. It was a lovely land.

He sighed and marveled in his heart that it could be the home of a race of cultivated barbarians to whom, providing that height, weight, and age were relatively the same, all Chinese actually did look alike.

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Robert Emmet Sherwood . . . one of America's most famous authors . . . but were you aware of his accomplishments in literary fields other than the drama?

As a playwright, we know Robert E. Sherwood as the brilliant author of THE ROAD TO ROME, *his first produced play;* REUNION IN VIENNA; THE PETRIFIED FOREST; IDIOT'S DELIGHT, ABE LINCOLN IN ILLINOIS, *and* THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT, *all three of which won Pulitzer Prizes.*

But Mr. Sherwood was also, in his time, one of our most astute dramatic critics — on the staff of "Vanity Fair"; the "father" of motion picture criticism — he founded the first column of movie criticism on the old "Life"; a perceptive and successful literary editor — of "Scribner's Magazine"; an outstanding movie scenarist — he worked with René Clair on "The Ghost Goes West," wrote the screen version of "Pride and Prejudice," won the 1946 Academy Award for the movie script of "The Best Years of Our Lives," and collaborated on the screenplay of "The Bishop's Wife."

Those are only the highlights . . . During the last war (and no one hopes more fervently than Robert E. Sherwood that it was the last *war) he was Director of Overseas Operations for the OWI, became one of President Roosevelt's most confidential advisers, and performed heroically in the service of his country. And on October 20, 1948 Harper & Brothers published Robert E. Sherwood's contribution to the field of history-and-biography — and again his work was acclaimed, for the book* ROOSEVELT AND HOPKINS *won Mr. Sherwood his fourth Pulitzer Prize.*

Robert E. Sherwood has written short stories too . . . and miracle of miracles, one in our own field!

Further comment when you have read Mr. Sherwood's tale, up to but not including the final sentence . . .

"EXTRA! EXTRA!"

by ROBERT E. SHERWOOD

FROM the street below came that most terrifying of sounds, the full-chested roar of two men shouting, "Extra! Extra!" through the rainy night.

"Extra! Extra!"

Mr. Whidden, reading his evening paper (it was the home edition, published at noon, containing no news whatsoever), wondered what the trouble was. He could gather nothing from the ominous shouts that assailed

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his ears. The two men might have been lusty-lunged Russians for all of him. But there was an ominous note in their voices — the warning of dark calamity — the grim suggestion of wars, plagues, holocausts.

"Where do they get those men with voices like that, and what do they do between extras?" he thought.

Mrs. Whidden emerged from the kitchen, whither she had retired to bathe the supper dishes.

"There's an extra out, Roy," she announced.

"So I hear," said her husband, who was not above an occasional facetious sally.

She walked over to the window, opened it, and thrust her head out into the rain. In the street, five stories below, she could see the two newsvenders.

"Extra! Extra!"

Mrs. Whidden turned from the window.

"Something must have happened."

There was an overtone of complaint in her remark that Mr. Whidden recognized only too well. It was a tone that always suggested unwelcome activity on Mr. Whidden's part. He wished that she would come right out and say, "Go downstairs and get the paper," but she never did. She always prefaced her commands with a series of whining insinuations.

"I wonder what it was?" she asked, as though expecting her husband to know.

"Oh, nothing, I guess. Those extras never amount to anything."

Mrs. Whidden turned again to the window.

"Something awful must have happened," she observed, and the counterpoint of complaint was even more pronounced.

Mr. Whidden shifted uneasily in his chair — the one comfortable chair in the flat — the chair which he himself had bought for his own occupancy and about which there had been so much argument. He knew what was coming; he didn't want to move, and walk down and up four flights of stairs for the sake of some information that would not affect his life in the remotest degree.

"Don't you intend to find *out*?" asked Mrs. Whidden, and it was evident that she had reached the snappy stage. Her husband knew that, if he didn't go down and buy that paper, he would provide fuel for an irritation that would burn well into the night. Nevertheless, that chair was so comfortable, and the weather was so disagreeable, and the stairs were such a climb!

"I guess I won't go down, Emmy. Those extras are always fakes, anyway, and, besides, if it is anything important, we'll find out about it in the morning paper."

The roars of the men shouting "Extra! Extra!" reverberated through the street, beating with determined violence against the sheer walls of the walk-up apartment houses, shuddering through the open window of the Whiddens's living-room, jarring the fringed shade of the reading-

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lamp, the souvenirs on the bookshelves, the tasseled portières that led into the little hall.

"You're just lazy, Roy Whidden," said Mrs. Whidden. "You sit there reading your paper — night after night — night after night." She turned as though to an invisible jury, to whom she was addressing a fervent plea for recognition of her prolonged martyrdom. Then, with all the dramatic suddenness of an experienced prosecutor, she snapped at the defendant: "What *do* you read, anyway? Answer me that! What *do* you read?"

Mr. Whidden knew that the question was purely rhetorical. No answer was expected.

"You don't read a *thing*. You just sit there and stare at that fool paper — probably the death notices. When anything important happens, you don't even care enough to step out into the street and find out what it is."

"How do *you* know it's important?" Mr. Whidden inquired, being inclined, albeit unwisely, to display a little spirit.

"How do you know it *isn't?*" Mrs. Whidden backfired. "How will you ever know *anything* unless you take the trouble to find out?"

Mr. Whidden uncrossed his legs and then crossed them again.

"I suppose you expect *me* to go down and get that paper," cried Mrs. Whidden, whose voice was now rivaling the newsvenders'. "With all I've got to do — the dishes, and the baby's ten-o'clock feeding, and . . . all right! I'll *go!* I'll walk down the four flights of stairs and *get* the paper, so that your majesty won't have to trouble yourself."

There was a fine sarcasm in her tone now.

Mr. Whidden knew that it was the end. For seven years this exact scene had been repeating itself over and over again. If there had only been some slight variation in his wife's technique . . . but there never had. At first, he had tried to be frightfully sporting about it, assuming the blame at the first hint of trouble and doing whatever was demanded of him with all possible grace; but that pose, and it had not been long before he admitted that it *was* a pose, was worn away by a process of erosion, a process that had kept up for seven years — seven years of writing things in ledgers in an airless office on Dey Street, in Manhattan; seven years of listening to those endless scoldings and complaints at home. Whatever of gallantry had existed in Mr. Whidden's soul had crumbled before the persistent and ever-increasing waves of temper. He knew that now, if he gave in, he did so because of cowardice and not because of any worthily chivalrous motives.

He threw his paper down, stood up, and walked into the bedroom to get his coat. Little Conrad was asleep in there, lying on his stomach, his face pressed against the bars of the crib.

Over the crib hung a colored pho-

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tograph of the Taj Mahal, a lovely, white building that Mr. Whidden had always wanted to see. He also wanted to see Singapore, and the Straits Settlements, and the west coast of Africa, places that he had read about in books.

He was thinking about these places, and wondering whether little Conrad would ever see them, when his wife's voice rasped at him from the next room.

"Are you going or will I have to go?"

"I'm going, dear," he assured her, in the manner of one who is tired.

"Well, hurry! Those men are a block away by now."

Mr. Whidden put on his coat, looked at little Conrad and at the Taj Mahal, and then started down the stairs.

There were four flights of them, and it was raining hard outside.

Twelve years later Mrs. Whidden (now Mrs. Burchall) sat sewing on the front porch of a pleasant house in a respectable suburb. It was a brilliantly sunny day, and the hydrangeas were just starting to burst out into profuse bloom on the bushes at either side of the steps.

"And do you mean to tell me you never *heard* from him?" asked Mrs. Lent, who was also sewing.

"Not a word," replied Mrs. Burchall, without rancor. "Not one word in twelve years. He used to send money sometimes to the bank, but they'd never tell me where it came from."

"I guess you ain't sorry he went. Fred Burchall's a good man."

"You'd think he was a good man all right if you could've seen what I had before. My *goodness!* When I think of the seven years I wasted being Roy Whidden's wife!"

Mrs. Burchall heaved a profound sigh.

"Ain't you ever sort of afraid he might show up?" asked Mrs. Lent.

"Not him. And if he did, what of it? Fred could kick him out with one hand tied behind his back. Fred Burchall's a real *man.*"

She sewed in silence for a while.

"Of course, I *am* a little worried about Conrad. He thinks his father's dead. You see, we wanted to spare him from knowing about the divorce and all that. We couldn't have the boy starting out in life with his father's disgrace on his shoulders."

Shortly thereafter Mrs. Lent went on her way and Mrs. Burchall stepped into the house to see whether the maid was doing anything constructive.

She found her son Conrad curled up in a chair, reading some book.

"You sitting in the house reading on a fine day like this! Go on out into the fresh air and sunshine and shake your limbs."

"But, mother —"

"Go on out, I tell you. Can't you try to be a *real* boy for a change?"

"But this book's exciting."

"I'll bet. Anything in print is better than fresh air and outdoor

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exercise, I suppose. You're just like your — can't you ever stop reading for one *instant*? I declare! One of these days you'll turn into a book. . . . Now you set that book down and go out of this house this very instant."

Conrad went out to the front yard and started, with no enthusiasm, to bounce an old golf ball up and down upon the concrete walk that led from the front porch to the gate. He was thus engaged when a strange man appeared in the street, stopping before the gate to look for the number which wasn't there.

"Hey, sonny, is this Mrs. Burchall's house?"

"Yes," said the boy, "it is. Want to see her?"

The man was short, slight, and none too formidable-looking; although he was obviously a representative of the lower classes — possibly a tramp — Conrad was not in the least afraid of him.

He had a rather friendly expression, a peaceful expression, as though he bore ill-will to no one.

"What's your name?" the man inquired.

"My name's Conrad — Conrad Whidden."

Conrad wondered why the man stared at him so.

"I used to know your mother," the man explained, "before I went to sea."

"Oh, you're a sailor!" Conrad was obviously impressed. "Where've you been?"

"Oh, all over. I just came from Marseilles."

"Gosh," said Conrad. "I'd like to go there. I've been reading about it in a book — it's a book called *The Arrow of Gold*."

The man smiled.

"You were named after the man who wrote that book," the sailor told him.

"I never knew that."

"No, I guess not. Your mother didn't know, either."

Just then Mrs. Burchall appeared on the front steps, attracted perhaps by the suspicious cessation of the sharp pops that the golf ball had been making as it bounced on the concrete walk.

When she saw her former husband leaning on the gate, her first thought was this: "Well, of all things! And here I was talking about him to Adele Lent not ten minutes ago." Then she realized, with sudden horror, that her son was actually in conversation with his father.

She wondered whether that fool Roy had said anything.

"Conrad, you come here this instant!"

Conrad ambled up the concrete walk.

"How many times do I have to tell you not to talk to every strange man that comes around?"

"He's a sailor, Mother."

"Oh, a sailor, is he!" Somehow or other that annoyed Mrs. Burchall. "Well, you just chase yourself around to the back and don't let me catch

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you talking to any tramps — or sailors, either."

Conrad cast one glance toward the man who had come from Marseilles, and then disappeared from view behind the house.

Mrs. Burchall walked elegantly down to the front gate and confronted Roy Whidden.

"So you're a sailor, are you?" she said, and surveyed him with deliberate satisfaction. "You look to me like a common bum. I always knew you'd never get anywhere."

"I guess you were right."

He smiled as he said this. Mrs. Burchall was irritated by the easy good humor of his tone, by the calm confidence in his eyes.

"Why did you do it?" she asked tartly.

"I don't know. It was a rainy night, and I heard a foghorn out in the river."

"So you left me for a foghorn!"

"Yes — I knew you'd be all right. Your people had money, and I sent some."

"A lot you sent."

"I guess it wasn't much — but it was all I could scrape together."

"Well, what are you bumming around here for now? What do you want? More money? Well, you won't get it. Not one nickel. I told Fred Burchall if you ever showed up, he was to kick you right out. And he'd do it, too! I advise you to make yourself scarce before *he* gets home."

"Don't worry, I'm going. My ship sails at six."

"Oh, your *ship* sails, does it! I'll bet it's a *fine* ship." She laughed harshly at the mental picture of any ship on which Roy Whidden could obtain employment. "How did you ever find out where I live?"

"Oh, I kept track of you through the bank. I knew when you got the divorce and got married again."

"Well, then, why didn't you leave me alone? What did you come snoopin' around here for?"

"Just curiosity. I wanted to see what the boy looks like."

"Well — you've seen him."

"Yes, I've seen him. That's all I wanted."

He straightened up and started to move away. "Well — goodbye, Em."

"Goodbye, and I hope you enjoy yourself on that *ship* of yours."

He was walking away down the street when suddenly she called to him: "*Roy!*" He stopped abruptly in response to that well-remembered summons.

"There was something I meant to ask you," she said with an unusual hesitancy.

EDITORS' NOTE: *Robert E. Sherwood's story was not written originally as a Puzzle. As a matter of fact, the original version contains four more paragraphs, but the author has graciously permitted EQMM to delete these four closing paragraphs and print the story in its present form — so that we can challenge you to answer the following question:*

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What was it that Mrs. Whidden meant to ask her husband?

You will find Mrs. Whidden's query directly below — printed upside down.

Mrs. Whidden asked:
"What was that extra about?"

EDITORS' POSTSCRIPT: *It was so obvious, wasn't it? Or did you fail to see the forest for the trees? After not having seen her husband, or heard from him, for twelve years, all Mrs. Whidden wanted to know was — What was that extra about?*

What price marriage? What price a dozen years of silence and separation?

But as you read these words, perhaps you are wondering: How does Robert E. Sherwood's story, excellent as it is, qualify for publication in a mystery magazine? True, the Editors have transformed the tale into a sort of literary puzzle — but surely it is stretching even the most elastic editorial policy to include this kind of riddle in a periodical dedicated to crime and detection.

Ah, dear reader! Have you again failed to see the forest for the trees? The obvious is sometimes more difficult to grasp than the subtle. For surely you realize that Mr. Whidden is a criminal, and that you have, therefore, been reading a crime story!

Mr. Whidden is guilty of abandonment of wife and child — and that is a crime according to New York Penal Code, Sections 480, 481, and 482.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946

of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, published monthly at Concord, N. H., for October 1, 1949

State of New York, County of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Joseph W. Ferman, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the General Manager of the *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 (section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations), to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and general manager are: *Publisher*, Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; *Editor*, Ellery Queen, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; *Managing Editor*, Robert P. Mills, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; *General Manager*, Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. 2. That the owners are: The American Mercury, Inc., 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. J. W. Ferman, *General Manager*. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 22nd day of September, 1949. [Seal] Ethel M. Shields, *Notary Public*. (My commission expires March 30, 1950.)

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SCIENCE AND THE COP

by FREDERICK BECHDOLT

"You'll take care of me, Lieutenant?" The voice of the cigar-stand proprietor was thin and anxious.

"I'll see what I can do, Louis." Detective Lieutenant Greggains glanced at his wrist-watch. "Time's wastin'. And me with a murder case to crack before six o'clock, or else —" He nodded at the insignificant little man behind the show-case, framed by festoons of magazines. "I might drop in tonight on my way home."

He looked bigger than he was, walking down the mean, narrow street. Younger men in the Homicide Bureau, trained in modern scientific methods, sometimes complained about his habit of taking time out, as he had just now with the cigar-stand proprietor, while he was busy on an important case. Detective Sergeant Lane, who had been teaming with him for two years, maintained that this continual harkening to requests for favors was a hangover from the rough old flatfoot days.

It was nearly two o'clock when Greggains passed through the wide grim entrance of the Central Police Station. Half an hour later his partner entered the Homicide Bureau and found him sitting behind his desk, staring at a little key.

"Find anything new down on Howard Street?" Lane asked.

Greggains shook his head.

"If we don't crack this case before six o'clock," Lane growled, "they'll spring Houseman on a writ." He scowled. "What's the big idea?"

Greggains shoved back his chair and began talking slowly.

"On August second, William Langdon drops out of sight. Last man seen with Langdon was James Houseman. They were seen leaving Houseman's office in the 800 block of Howard Street. Houseman says they walked up Howard nine blocks and parted at the corner. Houseman owns a thirty-eight caliber police-model Colt revolver. We found it in his apartment last night. It has been cleaned recently. The two men have been mixed up in the race handbooks, and Houseman is a big shot in that end of town. If anybody could put the finger on him, chances are that they wouldn't talk."

He ticked the key with his forefinger.

"We have pegged everything else that we took off of him, but we don't know what lock this fits. There is a door somewhere; and when we find it, I think we'll find what's left of Langdon." He rose slowly from his chair. "We're going to take Mr. Houseman for a little walk."

Lane shook his head. "What'll that get us?"

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"There is a gadget," Greggains said. "They call it the lie-detector. You clamp it on a man's arm and ask him questions. It has a graph connected with it to register his blood-pressure. When he tells the truth, the pressure remains normal. When he lies, it takes a jump."

"We haven't got one," Lane reminded him.

"If we had one," Greggains said, "it wouldn't do any good. But it's given me an idea."

Lane glanced at his watch. "Only three hours to go. That idea better be good."

It was after three o'clock when Lane slid behind the wheel and his partner settled down beside Houseman in the rear seat of a shabby prowl car.

"Park as near his office as you can," Greggains directed.

Houseman said nothing. He had spent most of the last twenty-one hours facing a bright light, listening to questions, answering some, ignoring others; he hadn't wasted any words. If worry troubled him, he failed to show it; lack of sleep had left him as unruffled as his pale gray suit with paler pin stripes. His hair was light, his eyebrows lighter. He looked as cold and colorless as an ice-cube.

The police car slipped through traffic, eased around several corners, and drew up to the curb in the 800 block of Howard Street. The three men got out and walked slowly up the sidewalk. Houseman was looking straight before him until he felt the thick fingers of Detective Lieutenant Greggains upon his wrist. Then he turned his head and frowned.

"It's up to you," Greggains asserted. "I can cuff you to me if you would rather." His index finger slipped behind the base of Houseman's thumb, and they walked on in silence.

They had gone five blocks and were passing a four-story building whose brick façade was dingy with smoke and dust. The ground-floor entrance opened into a billiard parlor; the upper-floor windows were placarded with *For Rent* signs. The three men were in front of the narrow stairway entrance when Greggains slackened his pace and looked sharply at Houseman. Four blocks farther on they halted and started back to the car. Repassing the spot where he had slackened his pace before, Greggains glanced at the prisoner again and nodded at the stairway entrance.

"That's the door."

To Lane's surprise, it was. And as soon as he had opened it, he knew what they were going to find. They climbed the stairs and the evidence became unmistakable. A thin film of perspiration was on Houseman's forehead.

The third floor was occupied by a long loft. The body was lying in the middle of the room. The prisoner said nothing when they halted before it, but he was breathing thickly. Greggains held him by the wrist and listened to the things which Lane told him.

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"Slug entered the back of his head," Lane announced. "Passed out through the forehead."

Less than half an hour later they found it imbedded in the woodwork.

"Thirty-eight caliber!" Lane's voice was exultant.

"The ballistics man will tie it to that gun we found in his room," Greggains said. Houseman's knees buckled but he recovered himself at once.

Four hours later the two detectives were sitting in the Homicide Bureau.

"It's in the bag now," Greggains said. "We'll call it a day."

"The lie-detector!" Lane cried. "That was smart thinking."

"His pulse jumped like a scared bullfrog when we passed that door." Greggains was smiling. "This science ain't so bad."

On his way home to a late dinner he happened to remember the rabbit-faced little man, and he stopped for a few minutes at the cigar-stand.

"It's okay, Louis. The slug ties to his gun. He's cracking now, and he'll talk tomorrow. We won't need you to testify. I covered up for you by putting on an act. Scientific stuff! They all fell for it. Nobody knows that you saw Houseman and Langdon going up those stairs." He nodded benignly. "Much obliged."

Winner of 1st Story-Title Contest

The $100 prize for the best title for Philip MacDonald's story in the October issue of EQMM was awarded to:

T. J. Murphy
Burlington, Vt.

In addition, because of the unexpectedly large number of entries and their high average of excellence, the judges decided to award Honorable Mentions to 20 other contestants, each of whom will receive a one-year free subscription to EQMM. The Honorable Mention winners were: Mrs. Marion J. Ballentine, Spokane, Wash.; Laurence L. Butler, Roanoke, Va.; Captain Thomas I. Darcy, Jr., Washington, D. C.; C. B. Dudley, Jr., Memphis, Tenn.; Miss Virginia Freese, New York, N. Y.; Mrs. A. A. Garrett, Dallas, Texas; Alfred M. Gilbert, Roselle, N. J.; Mrs. Noe Higinbotham, Pullman, Wash.; Leslie M. Hoenscheid, Peru, Ill.; Miss Wardine Mabry, Shreveport, La.; Mrs. Robert A. McIntosh, Hellertown, Pa.; Thomas S. McNeeley, E. Liverpool, Ohio; Clifton Morris, Lubbock, Texas; William Ramsay, Boulder, Colo.; Miss Shirley Spencer, New York, N. Y.; Mrs. R. W. Stoughton, Oak Ridge, Tenn.; Ernst H. Suerken, Dobbs Ferry, N. Y.; Clayton B. Verdeaux, Oak Lawn, Ill.; Bill Warren, Sterling, Kansas; and Jesse M. Westwick, Springfield, Ill.

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QUEEN'S QUORUM: *Part Six*

by ELLERY QUEEN

THE First Golden Era, 1901–1910, carved out seventeen cornerstones in the field of the detective-crime short story — three more than the number of key books that emerged from the Doyle Decade immediately preceding. Glorious names were added to the directory of detectives and to the register of rogues — after Dupin, Lecoq, Sherlock Holmes, Martin Hewitt, Prince Zaleski, and Raffles, we see the equally immortal signatures of Eugène Valmont, Arsène Lupin, The Thinking Machine, Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford, the Old Man in the Corner, Dr. Thorndyke, Cleek, Luther Trant. Nevertheless, it can be said in absolute truth that detective-hood had not yet reached its fullest flower. Great heroes (and heroines) were still to come.

VI. The Second Golden Era

The Second Golden Era began and ended on high notes. The first year, 1911, passed a manhunting miracle with the publication of one of the finest volumes of short stories ever conceived and written; the last year of the decade, 1920, produced no less than six short-story cornerstones in a single year! And in the years between the detective-crime short offered "good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over."

The miracle-book of 1911 introduced Father Brown to an eternally grateful public. The position of Father Brown has been expressed most pithily by Barnaby Ross who wrote: "If there is one character in detective fiction who possesses the innocence and wisdom to sit beside the immortal Holmes, it is that apotheosis of incredulity, Father Brown." You will find in

46. G. K. Chesterton's
THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN
London: Cassell, 1911

all the wondrous qualities of Chesterton's genius: his extraordinary cleverness of plot, his unique style, and his brilliant use of paradox both in language and in the counterplay of the supernatural and the natural. In a letter to a

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famous *aficionado* we once wrote that Father Brown is "one of the three greatest detective characters ever invented." The correspondent replied with some puzzlement: he assumed (correctly) that another of the "three greatest" was Sherlock Holmes, but he wasn't sure whom we meant for the third. This is a perfect example in literature of not seeing the forest for the trees: the third is, of course, the *first* — Poe's Dupin.

In 1911 a star of first magnitude named Brown . . . and in the same year, by coincidence, a lesser light named Jones — Adrian Van Reypen Egerton Jones, better known as

47. Samuel Hopkins Adams's
AVERAGE JONES
Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1911

According to the anonymous author of the dust-wrapper blurb on the first edition, Average Jones is "the cleverest detective since Sherlock Holmes. Everything about the book is refreshingly original. Humor is as strong as mystery. Adventure is emphasized above sensation. Instead of the ghastly and the grewsome, here is an entertainment always gay, brisk, and fascinating." The blurb-writer was over-enthusiastic, yet more accurate than most of his breed.

Father Brown, Average Jones, and in the same year Europe's first great Teutonic sleuth in the short form — the almost-impossible-to-find-in-print Herr Dagobert. According to Dr. Norbert Lederer, the earliest book of Dagobert's adventures is a tiny volume bound in black flexible leather. German trade bibliographies list

48. Balduin Groller's
DETEKTIV DAGOBERTS TATEN UND ABENTEUER
(DETECTIVE DAGOBERT'S DEEDS AND ADVENTURES)
Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1911

as the first of a series of three volumes, the second also having appeared in 1911, and the third in 1912, all three bearing the same title. S. S. Van Dine claimed there were six books * of Dagobert short stories published by Reclam, but bibliographic data is lacking on the other three. The only Dagobert volume we have ever seen is a thin paperback titled NEUE DETEKTIV-GESCHICHTEN (NEW DETECTIVE STORIES), published in Leipzig by Hesse & Becker, date unknown.

In 1912 came America's gift to the scientific school of detection — Professor Craig Kennedy of the faculty of Columbia University. The nemesis

*Page [474] in THE GREAT DETECTIVE STORIES, edited by Willard Huntington Wright

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of The Clutching Hand is far below Dr. Thorndyke in sleuthian stature, but the first of his books

49. Arthur B. Reeve's
THE SILENT BULLET
New York: Dodd, Mead, 1912

is an unequivocal cornerstone — as is another pseudo-seer's adventures which were published anonymously in the same year. Acknowledgment of authorship was made in the book itself by means of a cipher: the first letters of the first words of the twenty-four stories read THE AUTHOR IS GELETT BURGESS; the last letters of the last words of the twenty-four stories read: false to life and false to art. The detective so scornfully exposed is Armenian-born Astrogon Kerby, or Astro, who pretends to be a palmist and crystal-gazer and who affects a jeweled turban, flowing silk robes, silver-mounted water-pipe, and even a pet white lizard, in

50. [Gelett Burgess's]
THE MASTER OF MYSTERIES
Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1912

An important and excessively rare paperback appeared briefly in 1912 containing fifteen railway stories of which the first nine are "cases from the private note-book" of Thorpe Hazell. The protagonist in

51. Victor L. Whitechurch's
THRILLING STORIES OF THE RAILWAY
London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1912

is a fanatical devotee of vegetarianism and setting-up exercises; more significant historically, he is the earliest specialist in railway detection, antedating by four months Francis Lynde's SCIENTIFIC SPRAGUE (New York: Charles Scribner, 1912).

To top an outstanding year R. Austin Freeman made his second signal contribution to the genre. In

52. R. Austin Freeman's
THE SINGING BONE
London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912

the author invented what is now called the "inverted" detective story. In the conventional detective story, explained Dr. Freeman, the interest is made to focus on the all-important question: "Who did it?" The identity of the criminal is kept a secret to the very end of the story, and its disclosure (still quoting the author) forms the final climax. Dr. Freeman, a man of

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true scientific curiosity, posed to himself the intoxicating question: "Would it be possible to write a detective story in which from the outset the reader was taken entirely into the author's confidence, was made an actual witness of the crime and furnished with every fact that could possibly be used in its detection?" In other words, reverse the usual procedure: let the reader know everything, the detective nothing. Would the reader, in possession of all the facts, be able to foresee in advance how the detective would solve the mystery? Or would the reader be so occupied with the crime and its concomitant drama that he would overlook the evidence and still be dependent on the detective to find out how the case could be cracked?

Dr. Freeman was a courageous craftsman thus to challenge a technique in which deliberately he threw overboard the elements of puzzle, surprise, and suspense; but his dangerous and noble experiment was an historic success. The Freeman "inverted" tales were a monumental contribution to the development of the detective story, and from them have stemmed some of the great modern masterpieces of crime writing — especially those purely psychological studies in which the reader follows step by step the terrifying events leading up to the tragedy.

Another departure, combining modern detection and a more ancient form of storytelling, is embodied (and disembodied) in

53. William Hope Hodgson's
CARNACKI THE GHOST-FINDER
London: Eveleigh Nash, 1913

Carnacki, a "ghost-breaker" after Houdini's own heart, investigates haunted houses and similar phenomena, applies the technique of detection (bolstered by skepticism and a good camera), and arrives in some of the stories at perfectly natural solutions to supernatural mysteries. This book was not published in the United States until thirty-four years later (Sauk City, Wisconsin; Mycroft and Moran, 1947). The American edition is important because it contains three stories, discovered by August Derleth, which are not included in the English first edition.

We have omitted any mention so far of Anna Katharine Green, a unique figure in the field of detective fiction. The first woman to write detective stories in any land or language, she continued her work through most of the major periods of the genre. Her volumes of short stories range from 1883 through 1915 — a remarkable span, both historically and creatively. From a collecting standpoint her most important books of shorts are X. Y. Z. (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1883) and 7 TO 12 (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1887) — both extremely scarce in original wrappers. From a cornerstone standpoint, however, the most representative book is

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54. Anna Katharine Green's
MASTERPIECES OF MYSTERY
New York: Dodd, Mead, 1913

whose brazen title the publisher must have come to regret, since the book was reissued in 1919 as simply ROOM NUMBER 3. And nearly as representative is THE GOLDEN SLIPPER (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1915) with its "problems for Violet Strange" — the society debutante who "was vivacity incarnate" but who had moments when "a woman's lofty soul shone through her odd, bewildering features."

Another detective-variation, again combining the old and the new, revealed itself in the backwoods-sleuth of

55. Hesketh Prichard's
NOVEMBER JOE
Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913

As the book points out, "the specialty of a Sherlock Holmes is the everyday routine of a woodsman. Observation and deduction are part and parcel of his daily existence. He literally reads as he runs. The floor of the forest is his page." November Joe, a memorable conception, is a sort of modern Leatherstocking "who would sooner hunt a deer than a man any day." The American edition of NOVEMBER JOE has priority because it appeared one month ahead of the English first edition (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913). A "Popular Edition" issued later (London: Philip Allan, 1936) contains a short Preface by John Buchan.

In 1914 "wise, witty, gentle" Max Carrados — the first blind detective in modern fiction — began his supersensory career in

56. Ernest Bramah's
MAX CARRADOS
London: Methuen, 1914

This book, by any standards, is one of the ten best volumes of detective shorts ever written — yet it has never been issued in the United States, despite the fact that in England six substantial editions were sold out in the first ten years of its life. Even Max Carrados himself cannot explain the singular obtuseness of certain American publishers — and Max Carrados can run his fingertips along the surface of a newspaper, feel the infinitesimal height of printers' ink over the paper itself, and "read" any type larger than long primer — to say nothing of that amazing moment when a man sauntered past Max Carrados and the blind detective deduced with unassailable logic that the man wore a false mustache!

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Six detective short stories about the unassuming and philosophical Inspector Joly are included in

57. Arthur Sherburne Hardy's
DIANE AND HER FRIENDS
Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914

The style is suave and mellow, a welcome relief in these days of terse and jolting prose. Two years later a work of high literary art became a classic overnight. The tales of subtle murder and Oriental passion in

58. Thomas Burke's
LIMEHOUSE NIGHTS
London: Grant Richards, 1916

foreshadowed the author's detective masterpiece, *The Hands of Mr. Ottermole*. This short story, the last word in the evocation of atmosphere and terror on the printed page, was first printed in America in (believe it or not!) the May 1931 issue of "College Humor." You can find it — and it is worth your most intensive book-searching — in THE PLEASANTRIES OF OLD QUONG (London: Constable, 1931), published in the United States as A TEA-SHOP IN LIMEHOUSE (Boston: Little, Brown, 1931).

It has long been taken for granted that there is only one short story about burly, impish Hanaud — *The Affair at the Semiramis Hotel*, included, with twelve other tales of crime and detection, in

59. A. E. W. Mason's
THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE WORLD
London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917

The character of Gabriel Hanaud is a composite portrait of Macé and Goron, real-life chiefs of the Sûreté-Générale in Paris. He has no lean and hungry look that might have frightened Caesar, this professional French policeman who is gifted with a puckish sense of humor, as elephantine as his body, and a sublimated common sense. This supposedly one-and-only Hanaud exploit in the short form also exists as a separate book edition — THE AFFAIR AT THE SEMIRAMIS HOTEL (New York: Charles Scribner, 1917). This is the true first edition, since it was published eight months before THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE WORLD; but we hold out little hope that you will ever locate a copy of the separate edition — it is one of the rarest of Twentieth Century firsts.

Actually, there are three other Hanaud shorts. One is buried in an otherwise non-Hanaud novel by Mr. Mason — THE SAPPHIRE (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1933). Most of Chapter XVII, titled *The Man from Limoges*, is a complete and independent short story, bearing virtually no

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relationship to the novel. Both Hanaud and Ricardo appear in this chapter, Hanaud using the alias of Monsieur Chaunard until the denouement. The tale also contains one of Hanaud's brightest malapropisms — he refers to the C.I.D. as the Q.E.D.

Of the other two Hanaud short stories one is titled *The Ginger King* and appeared in "The Strand," issue of August 1940; it will be published soon in "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine." The other, titled *The Healer*, exists only in manuscript form. Apparently, on finishing the original short-story version of *The Healer*, Mr. Mason decided that the basic idea was more suited to a full-length novel. Changed and, of course, tremendously expanded, *The Healer* became THEY WOULDN'T BE CHESSMEN (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935).

(*to be continued in the March issue*)

THE AFFAIR AT THE SEMIRAMIS HOTEL

by A. E. W. MASON

MR. RICARDO, when the excitements of the Villa Rose were done with, returned to Grosvenor Square and resumed the busy, unnecessary life of an amateur. But the studios had lost their savor, artists their attractiveness, and even the Russian opera seemed a trifle flat. Life was altogether a disappointment; Fate, like an actress at a restaurant, had taken the wooden pestle in her hand and stirred all the sparkle out of the champagne; Mr. Ricardo languished — until one unforgettable morning.

He was sitting disconsolately at his breakfast-table when the door was burst open and a square, stout man, with the blue, shaven face of a French comedian, flung himself into the room. Ricardo sprang up in delight.

"My dear Hanaud!"

He seized his visitor by the arm, feeling it to make sure that here, in flesh and blood, stood the man who had introduced him to the acutest sensations of his life. He turned towards his butler, who was still bleating expostulations in the doorway at Hanaud's unceremonious irruption.

"Another place, Burton, at once," he cried, and as soon as he and Hanaud were alone: "What good wind blows you to London?"

"Business, my friend. The disappearance of bullion somewhere on the

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line between Paris and London. But it is finished. Yes, I take a holiday."

A light had suddenly flashed in Mr. Ricardo's eyes, and was now no less suddenly extinguished. Hanaud paid no attention whatever to his friend's disappointment. He pounced upon a piece of silver which adorned the tablecloth and took it over to the window.

"Everything is as it should be, my friend," he exclaimed, with a grin. "Grosvenor Square, the *Times* open at the money column, and a false antique upon the table. Thus I have dreamed of you. All Mr. Ricardo is in that sentence."

Ricardo laughed nervously. Recollection made him wary of Hanaud's sarcasms. He was shy even to protest the genuineness of his silver. But, indeed, he had not the time. For the door opened again and once more the butler appeared. On this occasion, however, he was alone.

"Mr. Calladine would like to speak to you, sir," he said.

"Calladine!" cried Ricardo in an extreme surprise. "That is the most extraordinary thing." He looked at the clock upon his mantelpiece. It was barely half-past eight. "At this hour, too?"

"Mr. Calladine is still wearing evening dress," the butler remarked.

Ricardo started in his chair. He began to dream of possibilities; and here was Hanaud miraculously at his side.

"Where is Mr. Calladine?" he asked.

"I have shown him into the library."

"Good," said Mr. Ricardo. "I will come to him."

But he was in no hurry. He sat and let his thoughts play with this incident of Calladine's early visit.

"It is very odd," he said. "I have not seen Calladine for months — no, nor has anyone. Yet, a little while ago, no one was more often seen."

He fell apparently into a muse, but he was merely seeking to provoke Hanaud's curiosity. In this attempt, however, he failed. Hanaud continued placidly to eat his breakfast, so that Mr. Ricardo was compelled to volunteer the story which he was burning to tell.

"Drink your coffee, Hanaud, and you shall hear about Calladine."

Hanaud grunted with resignation, and Mr. Ricardo flowed on:

"Calladine was one of England's young men. Everybody said so. He was going to do very wonderful things as soon as he had made up his mind exactly what sort of wonderful things he was going to do. Meanwhile, you met him in Scotland, at Newmarket, at Ascot, at Cowes, in the box of some great lady at the Opera, in any fine house where the candles that night happened to be lit. He went everywhere, and then a day came and he went nowhere. There was no scandal, no trouble, not a whisper against his good name. He simply vanished. For a little while a few people asked: 'What has become of Calladine?' But there never was

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any answer, and London has no time for unanswered questions. Other promising young men dined in his place. Calladine had joined the huge legion of the Come-to-nothings. No one even seemed to pass him in the street. Now unexpectedly, at half-past eight in the morning, and in evening dress, he calls upon me. 'Why?' I ask myself."

Mr. Ricardo sank once more into a reverie. Hanaud watched him with a broadening smile of pure enjoyment.

"And in time, I suppose," he remarked casually, "you will perhaps ask him?"

Mr. Ricardo sprang out of his pose to his feet.

"Before I discuss serious things with an acquaintance," he said with a scathing dignity, "I make it a rule to revive my impressions of his personality. The cigarettes are in the crystal box."

"They would be," said Hanaud, unabashed, as Ricardo stalked from the room. But in five minutes Mr. Ricardo came running back, all his composure gone.

"It is the greatest good fortune that you, my friend, should have chosen this morning to visit me," he cried, and Hanaud nodded with a little grimace of resignation.

"There goes my holiday. You shall command me now and always. I will make the acquaintance of your young friend."

He rose and followed Ricardo into his study, where a young man was nervously pacing the floor.

"Mr. Calladine," said Ricardo. "This is Mr. Hanaud."

The young man turned eagerly. He was tall, with a noticeable elegance and distinction, and the face which he showed to Hanaud was, in spite of its agitation, remarkably handsome.

"I am very glad," he said. "You are not an official of this country. You can advise — without yourself taking action."

Hanaud frowned. He bent his eyes uncompromisingly upon Calladine.

"What does that mean?" he asked, with a note of sternness in his voice.

"It means that I must tell someone," Calladine burst out in quivering tones. "That I don't know what to do. I am in a difficulty too big for me."

Hanaud looked at the young man keenly. It seemed to Ricardo that he took in every excited gesture, every twitching feature, in one comprehensive glance. Then he said in a friendlier voice:

"Sit down and tell me" — and he himself drew up a chair to the table.

"I was at the Semiramis last night," said Calladine, naming one of the great hotels upon the Embankment. "There was a fancy-dress ball."

All this happened, by the way, in those far-off days before the war when London, flinging aside its reticence, its shy self-consciousness, had become a city of carnivals and masquerades, rivaling its neighbors on the Continent in the spirit of its gaiety, and exceeding them by its stupendous

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luxury. "I went by the merest chance. My rooms are in the Adelphi Terrace."

"There!" cried Mr. Ricardo in surprise, and Hanaud lifted a hand to check his interruptions.

Calladine drew up a chair opposite to Hanaud and, seating himself, told, with many nervous starts and in troubled tones, a story which, to Mr. Ricardo's thinking, was as fabulous as any out of the "Arabian Nights."

"I had a ticket," he began, "but no domino. I was consequently stopped by an attendant in the lounge at the top of the staircase leading down to the ballroom.

" 'You can hire a domino in the cloakroom, Mr. Calladine,' he said to me. I had already begun to regret the impulse which had brought me, and I welcomed the excuse with which the absence of a costume provided me. I was, indeed, turning back to the door, when a girl who had at that moment run down from the stairs of the hotel into the lounge, cried gaily: 'That's not necessary'; and at the same moment she flung to me a long scarlet cloak which she had been wearing over her own dress. She was young, fair, rather tall, slim, and very pretty; her hair was drawn back from her face with a ribbon, and rippled down her shoulders in heavy curls; and she was dressed in a satin coat and knee-breeches of pale green and gold, with a white waistcoat and silk stockings and scarlet heels to her satin shoes. She was as straight-limbed as a boy, and exquisite like a figure in Dresden china. I caught the cloak and turned to thank her. But she did not wait. With a laugh she ran down the stairs, a supple and shining figure, and was lost in the throng at the doorway of the ballroom. I was stirred by the prospect of an adventure. I ran down after her. She was standing just inside the room alone, and she was gazing at the scene with parted lips and dancing eyes. She laughed again as she saw the cloak about my shoulders, and I said to her:

" 'May I dance with you?'

" 'Oh, do!' she cried, with a little jump, and clasping her hands. She was of a high and joyous spirit and not difficult in the matter of an introduction. 'This gentleman will do very well to present us,' she said, leading me in front of a bust of the God Pan which stood in a niche of the wall. 'I am, as you see, straight out of an opera. My name is Celymène or anything with an eighteenth-century sound to it. You are — what you will. For this evening we are friends.'

" 'And for tomorrow?' I asked.

" 'I will tell you about that later on,' she replied, and she began to dance with a light step and a passion in her dancing which earned me many an envious glance from the other men. I was in luck, for Celymène knew no one, and though, of course, I saw the faces of a great many people whom I remembered, I kept them all at a distance. We had been dancing for about half an hour

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when the first queerish thing happened. She stopped suddenly in the midst of a sentence with a little gasp. I spoke to her, but she did not hear. She was gazing past me, her eyes wide open, and such a rapt look upon her face as I had never seen. She was lost in a miraculous vision. I followed the direction of her eyes and, to my astonishment, I saw nothing more than a stout, short, middle-aged woman, egregiously overdressed as Marie Antoinette.

" 'So you do know someone here?' I said, and I had to repeat the words sharply before my friend withdrew her eyes. But even then she was not aware of me. It was as if a voice had spoken to her while she was asleep and had disturbed, but not wakened her. Then she came to — there's really no other word I can think of — she came to with a deep sigh.

" 'No,' she answered. 'She is a Mrs. Blumen from Chicago, a widow with ambitions and a great deal of money. But I don't know her.'

" 'Yet you know all about her,' I remarked.

" 'She crossed in the same boat with me,' Celymène replied. 'Did I tell you that I landed at Liverpool this morning? She is staying at the Semiramis too. Oh, let us dance!'

"She twitched my sleeve impatiently, and danced with a kind of violence and wildness as if she wished to banish some sinister thought. And she did undoubtedly banish it. We supped together and grew confidential, as under such conditions people will. She told me her real name. It was Joan Carew.

" 'I have come over to get an engagement if I can at Covent Garden. I am supposed to sing all right.'

" 'You have some letters of introduction, I suppose?' I asked.

" 'Oh, yes. One from my teacher in Milan. One from an American manager.'

"In my turn I told her my name and where I lived, and I gave her my card. I thought, you see, that since I used to know a good many operatic people, I might be able to help her.

" 'Thank you,' she said, and at that moment Mrs. Blumen, followed by a party, came into the supper-room and took a table close to us. There was at once an end of all confidences — indeed, of all conversation. Joan Carew lost all the lightness of her spirit; she talked at random, and her eyes were drawn again and again to the grotesque slander on Marie Antoinette. Finally I became annoyed.

" 'Shall we go?' I suggested impatiently, and to my surprise she whispered passionately:

" 'Yes. Please! Let us go.'

"Her voice was actually shaking, her small hands clenched. We went back to the ballroom, but Joan Carew did not recover her gaiety, and half way through a dance, when we were near the door, she stopped abruptly.

" 'I shall go,' she said. 'I am tired.'

"I protested, but she made a little grimace.

" 'You'll hate me in half an hour. Let's be wise and stop now while we

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are friends,' she said, and while I removed the domino from my shoulders she stooped very quickly. It seemed to me that she picked up something which had lain hidden beneath the sole of her slipper. She certainly moved her foot, and I certainly saw something small and bright flash in the palm of her glove as she raised herself again.

" 'Yes, we'll go,' she said, and we went up the stairs into the lobby.

" 'But I shall meet you again?' I asked.

" 'Yes. I have your address. I'll write and fix a time when you will be sure to find me in. Good night, and a thousand thanks.'

"She was speaking lightly as she held out her hand, but her grip tightened a little and — clung.

" 'I am half inclined to ask you to stay, however dull I am; and dance with me till daylight — the safe daylight,' she said.

" 'Let us go back then!' I urged. She gave me an impression suddenly of someone quite forlorn. But Joan Carew recovered her courage, 'No, no,' she answered quickly. She snatched her hand away and ran lightly up the staircase, turning at the corner to wave her hand and smile. It was then half-past one in the morning."

"And when did you go home?" Hanaud asked of Calladine.

Calladine was not sure. His partner had left behind her the strangest medley of sensations in his breast. He was puzzled, haunted, and charmed. He had to think about her; sleep was impossible. He wandered for a while about the ballroom. Then he walked to his chambers along the echoing streets and sat at his window; and some time afterwards the hoot of a motor-horn broke the silence and a car stopped and whirred in the street below. A moment later his bell rang.

He ran down the stairs in a queer excitement, unlocked the street door, and opened it. Joan Carew, still in her masquerade dress with her scarlet cloak about her shoulders, slipped through the opening.

"Shut the door," she whispered.

Calladine latched the door. Above, in the well of the stairs, the light spread out from the open door of his flat. Down here all was dark. He could just see the glimmer of her white face, the glitter of her dress, but she drew her breath like one who has run far. They mounted the stairs cautiously. He did not say a word until they were both safely in his parlor; and even then it was in a low voice.

"What has happened?"

"You remember the woman I stared at? You didn't know why I stared, but any girl would have understood. She was wearing the loveliest pearls I ever saw in my life."

Joan was standing by the edge of the table. She was tracing with her finger a pattern on the cloth as she spoke. Calladine started with a horrible presentiment.

"Yes," she said. "I worship pearls. I always have done so. For one thing, they improve on me. I haven't got

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any, of course. I have no money. But friends of mine who do own pearls have sometimes given theirs to me to wear when they were going sick, and they have always got back their lustre. I think that has had a little to do with my love of them. Oh, I have always longed for them."

She was speaking in a dull, monotonous voice. But Calladine recalled the ecstasy which had shone in her face when her eyes first had fallen on the pearls, the passion with which she had danced to throw the obsession off.

"And I never noticed them at all," he said.

"Yet they were wonderful. The color! The lustre! All evening they tempted me. I was furious that a fat, coarse creature like that should have such exquisite things. Oh, I was mad."

She covered her face suddenly with her hands and swayed. Calladine sprang towards her. But she held out her hand.

"No, I am all right." And though he asked her to sit down she would not. "You remember when I stopped dancing suddenly?"

"Yes. You had something hidden under your foot?"

The girl nodded.

"Her key!" And under his breath Calladine uttered a startled cry.

"A little Yale key," the girl continued. "I saw Mrs. Blumen looking on the floor for something, and then I saw it shining on the very spot. Mrs. Blumen's suite was on the same floor as mine, and her maid slept above. All the maids do. I knew that. Oh, it seemed to me as if I had sold my soul and was being paid."

Now Calladine understood what she had meant by her strange phrase — "the safe daylight."

"I went up to my little suite," Joan Carew continued. "I sat there with the key burning through my glove until I had given her time enough to fall asleep. Then I crept out. The corridor was dimly lit. Far away below the music was throbbing. Up here it was as silent as the grave. I opened the door — her door. I found myself in a lobby. The suite, though bigger, was arranged like mine. I slipped in and closed the door behind me. I listened in the darkness. I couldn't hear a sound. I crept forward to the door in front of me. I stood with my fingers on the handle and my heart beating fast enough to choke me. I had still time to turn back. But I couldn't. There were those pearls in front of my eyes, lustrous and wonderful. I opened the door gently an inch or so — and then — it all happened in a second."

Joan Carew faltered. The night was too near to her, its memory too poignant with terror. She shut her eyes tightly and cowered down in a chair.

"Go on," Calladine said.

"I found myself inside the room with the door shut behind me. I had shut it myself in a spasm of terror. And I dared not turn round to open it. I was helpless."

"What do you mean? She was awake?"

Joan Carew shook her head.

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"There were others in the room before me, and on the same errand — men!"

Calladine drew back, his eyes searching the girl's face.

"Yes?" he said slowly.

"I didn't see them at first. I didn't hear them. The room was quite dark except for one jet of fierce white light which beat upon the door of a safe. And as I shut the door the jet moved swiftly and the light reached me and stopped. I was blinded. I stood in the full glare of it, drawn up against the panels of the door, shivering, sick with fear. Then I heard a quiet laugh, and someone moved softly towards me. Oh, it was terrible! I recovered the use of my limbs; in a panic I turned to the door, but I was too late. While I fumbled with the handle I was seized; a hand covered my mouth. I was lifted to the centre of the room. The jet went out, the electric lights were turned on. There were two men dressed as apaches in velvet trousers and red scarves, like a hundred others in the ballroom below, and both were masked. I struggled furiously; but, of course, I was like a child in their grasp. 'Tie her legs,' the man whispered who was holding me; 'she's making too much noise.' I kicked and fought, but the other man stooped and tied my ankles, and I fainted.

"When I came to, the lights were still burning, the door of the safe was open, the room empty; I had been flung onto a couch at the foot of the bed. I was lying there quite free."

"Was the safe empty?" asked Calladine.

"I didn't look," she answered. "Oh!" — and she covered her face spasmodically with her hands. "I looked at the bed. Someone was lying there — under a sheet and quite still. There was a clock ticking in the room; It was the only sound. I was terrified. If I didn't get out of the room at once I felt that I should scream and bring everyone to find me alone with — what was under the sheet in the bed. I ran to the door and looked out through a slit into the corridor. It was still quite empty, and below the music still throbbed in the ballroom. I crept down the stairs, meeting no one until I reached the hall. I looked into the ballroom as if I was searching for someone. I stayed long enough to show myself. Then I got a cab and came to you."

Calladine sat watching the girl in silence.

Then he asked, and his voice was hard:

"Is that all you have to tell me?"

"Yes."

Calladine rose to his feet and stood beside her.

"Then how do you come to be wearing this?" he asked, and he lifted a chain of platinum and diamonds which she was wearing about her shoulders. "You weren't wearing it when you danced with me."

Joan Carew stared at the chain.

"No. It's not mine. I have never seen it before." Then a light came into her eyes. "The two men — they

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must have thrown it over my head when I was on the couch — before they went." She looked at it more closely. "That's it. The chain's not very valuable. They could spare it, and — it would accuse me — of what they did."

"Yes, that's very good reasoning," said Calladine coldly.

Joan Carew looked quickly up into his face.

"Oh, you don't believe me," she cried. "You think — oh, it's impossible."

"But you went to steal, you know," he said gently.

"Yes, I did, but not this." And she held up the necklace. "Should I have stolen this, should I have come to you wearing it, if I had stolen the pearls, if I had" — and she stopped — "if my story were not true?"

Calladine weighed her argument.

"No, I think you wouldn't," he said frankly.

Calladine looked at the clock. It was nearly five o'clock in the morning, and though the music could still be heard from the ballroom in the Semiramis, the night had begun to wane upon the river.

"You must go back," he said. "I'll walk with you."

They crept silently down the stairs and into the street. They met no one until they reached the Strand. There many, like Joan Carew in masquerade, were standing about, or walking hither and thither in search of carriages and cabs.

"You can slip in unnoticed," said Calladine as he looked into the thronged courtyard. "I'll telephone to you in the morning."

"You will?" she cried eagerly.

"Yes, for certain," he replied. "Wait in until you hear from me. I'll think it over. I'll do what I can."

"Thank you," she said fervently.

He watched her scarlet cloak flitting here and there in the crowd until it vanished through the doorway. Then, for the second time, he walked back to his chambers, while the morning crept up the river from the sea.

This was the story which Calladine told in Mr. Ricardo's library. Mr. Ricardo heard it out with varying emotions. He began with a thrill of expectation, like a man on a dark threshold of great excitements. The setting of the story appealed to him, too, by a sort of brilliant bizarrerie which he found in it. But, as it went on, he grew puzzled and a trifle disheartened. There were flaws and chinks; he began to bubble with unspoken criticisms, then swift and clever thrusts which he dared not deliver. He looked upon the young man with disfavor, as upon one who had half opened a door upon a theatre of great promise and shown him a spectacle not up to the mark. Hanaud, on the other hand, listened imperturbably, without an expression upon his face, until the end. Then he pointed a finger at Calladine and asked him what to Ricardo's mind was a most irrelevant question.

"You got back to your rooms, then,

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before five, Mr. Calladine, and it is now nine o'clock less a few minutes."

"Yes."

"Yet you have not changed your clothes. Explain to me that. What did you do between five and half-past eight?"

Calladine looked down at his rumpled shirt front.

"Upon my word, I never thought of it," he cried. "I was worried out of my mind. I couldn't decide what to do. Finally, I determined to talk to Mr. Ricardo, and after I had come to that conclusion I just waited impatiently until I could come round with decency."

Hanaud rose from his chair. His manner was grave, but conveyed no single hint of an opinion. He turned to Ricardo.

"Let us go round to your young friend's rooms in the Adelphi," he said; and the three men drove there at once.

Calladine lodged in a corner house and upon the first floor. His rooms, large and square and lofty, with Adam mantelpieces and a delicate tracery upon their ceilings, breathed the grace of the eighteenth century. Broad high windows, embrasured in thick walls, overlooked the river and took in all the sunshine and the air which the river had to give. And they were furnished fittingly. When the three men entered the parlor, Mr. Ricardo was astounded. He had expected the untidy litter of a man run to seed, the neglect and the dust of the recluse. But the room was as clean as the deck of a yacht; an Aubusson carpet made the floor luxurious underfoot; a few colored prints of real value decorated the walls; and the mahogany furniture was polished so that a lady could have used it as a mirror. There was even a china bowl full of fresh red roses.

"So you live here, Mr. Calladine?" said Hanaud.

"Yes."

"With your servants, of course?"

"They come in during the day," said Calladine, and Hanaud looked at him curiously.

"Do you mean that you sleep here alone?"

"Yes."

"But your valet?"

"I don't keep a valet," said Calladine; and again the curious look came into Hanaud's eyes.

"Yet," he suggested gently, "there are rooms enough in your set of chambers to house a family."

Calladine colored.

"I prefer at night not to be disturbed," he said, stumbling a little over the words.

Hanaud nodded his head with sympathy.

"Yes, yes. And it is a difficult thing to get — as difficult as my holiday," he said ruefully, with a smile for Mr. Ricardo. "However" — he turned towards Calladine — "no doubt, now that you are at home, you would like a bath and a change of clothes. And when you are dressed, perhaps you will telephone to the Semiramis and

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ask Miss Carew to come round here."

Hanaud shut the door upon Calladine, then crossed the room to Mr. Ricardo who, seated at the open window, was plunged deep in reflections.

"You have an idea, my friend," cried Hanaud.

Mr. Ricardo started out of an absorption which was altogether assumed.

"I was thinking," he said, with a faraway smile, "that you might disappear in the forests of Africa, and at once everyone would be very busy about your disappearance. You might leave your village in Leicestershire and live in the fogs of Glasgow, and within a week the whole village would know your postal address. But London — what a city! How different! How indifferent! Turn out of St. James's into the Adelphi Terrace and not a soul will say to you: 'Dr. Livingstone, I presume?' "

"But why should they," asked Hanaud, "if your name isn't Dr. Livingstone?"

Mr. Ricardo smiled indulgently.

"Scoffer!" he said. "You understand me very well," and he sought to turn the tables on his companion. "And you — does this room suggest nothing to you? Have you no ideas?" But he knew very well that Hanaud had. Ever since Hanaud had crossed the threshold he had been like a man stimulated by a drug.

"Yes," he said, "I have."

He was standing now by Ricardo's side with his hands in his pockets, looking out at the trees on the Embankment and the barges swinging down the river. In a moment or two he began to walk about the room with that curiously light step which Ricardo was never able to reconcile with his cumbersome figure. With the heaviness of a bear he still padded. He went from corner to corner, opened a cupboard here, a drawer of the bureau there.

"You are looking for something," Ricardo announced with sagacity.

"I am," replied Hanaud; and it seemed that in a second or two he found it. Yet — yet — he found it with his hands in his pockets, if he had found it. Mr. Ricardo saw him stop in that attitude in front of the mantelshelf, and heard him utter a long, low whistle. Upon the mantelshelf some photographs were arranged, a box of cigars stood at one end, a book or two lay between some delicate ornaments of china, and a small engraving in a thin gilt frame was propped at the back against the wall. Ricardo surveyed the shelf from his seat in the window, but he could not imagine which it was of these objects that so drew and held Hanaud's eyes.

Hanaud, however, stepped forward. He looked into a vase and turned it upside down. Then he removed the lid of a porcelain cup, and from the very look of his great shoulders Ricardo knew that he had discovered what he sought. He was holding something in his hands, turning it over, examining it. When he was satisfied he moved swiftly to the door and opened it cautiously. Both men

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could hear the splashing of water in a bath. Hanaud closed the door again with a nod of contentment and crossed once more to the window.

"Yes, it is all very strange and curious," he said, "and I do not regret that you dragged me into the affair. You were quite right, my friend, this morning. It is the personality of your young Mr. Calladine which is the interesting thing. For instance, here we are in London in the early summer. The trees out, freshly green, lilac and flowers in the gardens, and I don't know what tingle of hope and expectation in the sunlight and the air.

"Can you understand a young man with money, with fastidious tastes, good-looking, hiding himself in a corner at such a time — except for some overpowering reason? No. Nor can I. There is another thing — I put a question or two to Calladine.

"He has no servants here at night. He is quite alone and — here is what I find interesting — he has no valet. That seems a small thing to you?" Hanaud asked at a movement from Ricardo. "Well, it is no doubt a trifle, but it's a significant trifle in the case of a young rich man. It is generally a sign that there is something strange, perhaps even something sinister, in his life. Mr. Calladine, some months ago, turned out of St. James's into the Adelphi. Can you tell me why?"

"No," replied Mr. Ricardo.

Hanaud stretched out a hand. In his open palm lay a small round hairy bulb about the size of a big button and of a color between green and brown.

"Look!" he said. "What is that?"

Mr. Ricardo took the bulb wonderingly.

"It looks to me like the fruit of some kind of cactus."

Hanaud nodded.

"It is. You will see some pots of it in the hothouses of any really good botanical gardens. They are labeled *Anhalonium Luinii*. But among the Indians of Yucatan the plant has a simpler name."

"What name?" asked Ricardo.

"Mescal."

Mr. Ricardo repeated the name. It conveyed nothing to him whatever.

"Mescal is a drug."

Ricardo started.

"Yes, you are beginning to understand now," Hanaud continued, "why your young friend Calladine turned out of St. James's into the Adelphi Terrace."

Ricardo turned the little bulb over in his fingers.

"You make a decoction of it, I suppose?" he said.

"Or you can use it as the Indians do in Yucatan," replied Hanaud. "Mescal enters into their religious ceremonies. They sit at night in a circle about a fire built in the forest and chew it, while one of their number beats perpetually upon a drum."

Hanaud looked round the room and took notes of its luxurious carpet, its delicate appointments. Outside the window there was a clamor of voices. Boats went swiftly down the river on the ebb. Beyond the mass of the

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Semiramis rose the great gray-white dome of St. Paul's.

"It's a long way from the forests of Yucatan to the Adelphi Terrace of London," said Hanaud. "Yet here, I think, in these rooms, when the servants are all gone and the house is very quiet, there is a little corner of wild Mexico."

A look of pity came into Mr. Ricardo's face. He had seen more than one young man of great promise slacken his hold and let go, just for this reason.

"It's like bhang and kieff and the rest of the devilish things, I suppose," he said, indignantly tossing the button upon the table.

Hanaud picked it up.

"No," he replied. "It's not quite like any other drug. It has a quality of its own which just now is of particular importance to you and me. Yes, my friend, we must watch that we do not make the big fools of ourselves in this affair."

"There," Mr. Ricardo agreed with an ineffable air of wisdom, "I am entirely with you."

"Now, why?" Hanaud asked. Mr. Ricardo was at a loss for a reason, but Hanaud did not wait. "I will tell you. Mescal intoxicates, yes — but it does more — it gives to the man who eats of it color-dreams."

"Color-dreams?"

"Yes, strange heated charms, in which violent things happen vividly among bright colors. Color is the gift of this little prosaic brown button." He spun the bulb in the air like a coin, and catching it again, took it over to the mantelpiece and dropped it into the porcelain cup.

"Are you sure of this?" Ricardo cried excitedly, and Hanaud raised his hand in warning. He went to the door, opened it for an inch or so, and closed it again.

"I am quite sure," he returned. "I have for a friend a very learned chemist in the Collège de France. He is one of those enthusiasts who must experiment upon themselves. He tried this drug."

"Yes," Ricardo said in a quieter voice. "And what did he see?"

"He had a vision of a wonderful garden bathed in sunlight, an old garden of gorgeous flowers and emerald lawns, ponds with golden lilies and thick yew hedges — a garden where peacocks stepped indolently and groups of gay people fantastically dressed quarreled and fought with swords. That is what he saw. And he saw it so vividly that, when the vapors of the drug passed from his brain and he waked, he seemed to be coming out of the real world into a world of shifting illusions."

"Out of the real world," Mr. Ricardo quoted, "I begin to see."

"Yes, you begin to see, my friend, that we must be very careful not to make the big fools of ourselves. My friend of the Collège de France saw a garden. But had he been sitting alone in the window-seat where you are, listening through a summer night to the music of the masquerade at the Semiramis, might he not have seen

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the ballroom, the dancers, the scarlet cloak, and the rest of this story?"

"You mean," cried Ricardo, now fairly startled, "that Calladine came to us with the fumes of mescal still working in his brain, that the false world was the real one still for him."

"I do not know," said Hanaud. "At present I only put questions. I ask them of you. I wish to hear how they sound. Let us reason this problem out. Calladine, let us say, takes a great deal more of the drug than my professor. It will have on him a more powerful effect while it lasts, and it will last longer. Fancy-dress balls are familiar things to Calladine. The music floating from the Semiramis will revive old memories. He sits here, the pageant takes shape before him, he sees himself taking his part in it. Oh, he is happier here sitting quietly in his window-seat than if he was actually at the Semiramis. For he *is* there more intensely, more vividly, more really, than if he had actually descended this staircase. He lives his story through, the story of a heated brain, the scene of it changes in the way dreams have, it becomes tragic and sinister, it oppresses him with horror, and in the morning, so obsessed with it that he does not think to change his clothes, he is knocking at your door."

Mr. Ricardo raised his eyebrows.

"Ah! You see a flaw in my argument," said Hanaud. But Mr. Ricardo was wary. Too often in other days he had been leaped upon and trounced for a careless remark.

"Let me hear the end of your argument," he said. "There was then to your thinking no temptation of jewels, no theft, no murder — in a word, no Celymène?"

"No!" cried Hanaud. "Come with me, my friend. I am not so sure that there was no Celymène."

With a smile upon his face, Hanaud led the way across the room. He had the dramatic instinct, and rejoiced in it. He was going to produce a surprise for his companion and, savoring the moment in advance, he managed his effects. He walked towards the mantelpiece and stopped a few paces away.

"Look!"

Mr. Ricardo looked and saw a broad Adam mantelpiece. He turned a bewildered face to his friend.

"You see nothing?" Hanaud asked.

"Nothing!"

"Look again! I am not sure — but is not Celymène posing before you?"

Mr. Ricardo looked again. There was nothing to fix his eyes. He saw a book or two, a cup, a vase or two, and nothing else except a very pretty and apparently valuable piece of — and suddenly Mr. Ricardo understood. Straight in front of him, in the very centre of the mantelpiece, a figure in painted china was leaning against a china stile. It was the figure of a perfectly impossible courtier, feminine and exquisite, and appareled even to the scarlet heels, exactly as Calladine had described Joan Carew.

Hanaud chuckled with satisfaction when he saw the expression upon Mr. Ricardo's face.

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"Ah, you understand," he said. "Do you dream, my friend? At times — yes, like the rest of us. Then recollect your dreams? Things, people, which you have seen perhaps that day, perhaps months ago, pop in and out of them without making themselves prayed for. Thus, our friend here sits in the window, intoxicated by his drug, the music plays in the Semiramis, the curtain goes up in the heated theatre of his brain. He sees himself step upon the stage, and who else meets him but the china figure from his mantelpiece?"

Mr. Ricardo for a moment was all enthusiasm. Then his doubt returned to him.

"What you say, my dear Hanaud, is very ingenious. The figure upon the mantelpiece is also extremely convincing. And I should be absolutely convinced but for one thing."

"Yes?" said Hanaud.

"I am — I may say it, I think — a man of the world. And I ask myself whether a young man who has given up his social ties, who has become a hermit, and still more who has become the slave of a drug, would retain that scrupulous carefulness of his body which is indicated by dressing for dinner when alone?"

Hanaud struck the table with the palm of his hand.

"Yes. That is the weak point in my theory. You have hit it. I knew it was there — that weak point, and I wondered whether you would seize it. Yes, the consumers of drugs are careless, untidy — even unclean as a rule. But not always. We must be careful. We must wait."

"For what?" asked Ricardo.

"For the answer to a telephone message," replied Hanaud.

Both men waited impatiently until Calladine came into the room. He wore now a suit of blue serge, he had a clearer eye, his skin a healthier look; he was altogether a more reputable person. But he was plainly very ill at ease. He offered his visitors cigarettes, he proposed refreshments, he avoided entirely and awkwardly the object of their visit. Hanaud smiled. His theory was working out. Sobered by his bath, Calladine had realized the foolishness of which he had been guilty.

"You telephoned to the Semiramis, of course?" said Hanaud cheerfully.

Calladine grew red.

"Yes," he stammered.

"Yet I did not hear that volume of 'Hallos' which precedes telephonic connection in your country of leisure," Hanaud continued.

"I telephoned from my bedroom. You would not hear anything in this room."

"Yes, yes; the walls of these old houses are solid." Hanaud was playing with his victim. "And when may we expect Miss Carew?"

"I can't say," replied Calladine. "It's very strange. She is not in the hotel."

Mr. Ricardo and Hanaud exchanged a look. They were both satisfied now. There was no word of truth in Calladine's story.

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"Then there is no reason for us to wait," said Hanaud. "I shall have my holiday after all." And while he was yet speaking the voice of a newsboy calling out the first edition of an evening paper became distantly audible. Hanaud broke off his farewell. For a moment he listened, with his head bent. Then the voice was heard again, confused, indistinct; Hanaud picked up his hat and cane and, without another word to Calladine, raced down the stairs. Mr. Ricardo followed him, but when he reached the pavement, Hanaud was half down the little street. At the corner, however, he stopped, and Ricardo joined him, coughing and out of breath.

"What's the matter?" he gasped.

"Listen," said Hanaud.

At the bottom of Duke Street, by Charing Cross Station, the newsboy was shouting his wares. Both men listened, and now the words came to them.

"*Mysterious crime at the Semiramis Hotel!*"

Ricardo stared at his companion.

"You were wrong, then!" he cried. "Calladine's story was true."

For once Hanaud was quite disconcerted.

But before he could move a taxicab turned into the Adelphi from the Strand, and wheeling in front of their faces, stopped at Calladine's door. From the cab a girl descended.

"Let us go back," said Hanaud.

Mr. Ricardo could no longer complain. It was half-past eight when Calladine had first disturbed the formalities of his house in Grosvenor Square. It was barely ten now, and during that short time he had been flung from surprise to surprise.

"I am alive once more," Mr. Ricardo thought as he turned back with Hanaud, and in his excitement he cried his thought aloud.

"Are you?" said Hanaud. "And what is life without a newspaper? If you will buy one from that remarkably raucous boy at the bottom of the street, I will keep an eye upon Calladine's house till you come back."

Mr. Ricardo sped down to Charing Cross and brought back a copy of the *Star*. He handed it to Hanaud, who stared at it doubtfully, folded as it was.

"Shall we see what it says?" Ricardo asked impatiently.

"By no means," Hanaud answered, waking from his reverie and tucking the paper briskly away into the tail pocket of his coat. "We will hear what Miss Joan Carew has to say, with our minds undisturbed by any discoveries."

They went quickly to Calladine's rooms. As they entered Mr. Ricardo saw a girl turn to them suddenly a white face of terror, and flinch as though already she felt the hand of a constable upon her shoulder. Calladine, on the other hand, uttered a cry of relief.

"These are my friends," he exclaimed to the girl, "the friends of whom I spoke to you"; and to Hanaud he said: "This is Miss Carew."

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Hanaud bowed.

"You shall tell me your story, mademoiselle," he said very gently, and a little color returned to the girl's cheeks.

"But you have heard it," she answered.

"Not from you," said Hanaud.

So for a second time in that room she told the history of that night. She was just a very young and very pretty girl, telling in a low and remorseful voice of the tragic dilemma to which she had brought herself. Of Celymène all that remained was something exquisite and fragile in her beauty, in the slimness of her figure, in her daintiness of hand and foot — something almost of the hot-house. But the story she told was the same which Calladine had already related.

"Thank you," said Hanaud when she had done. "Now I must ask you two questions."

"I will answer them."

"You will forgive me, Miss Carew. But have you ever stolen before?"

Joan Carew turned upon Hanaud with spirit. Then a change swept over her face.

"You have a right to ask," she answered. "Never." She looked into his eyes as she answered. Hanaud did not move. He sat with a hand upon each knee and led to his second question.

"Early this morning, when you left this room, you told Mr. Calladine that you would wait at the Semiramis until he telephoned to you?"

"Yes."

"Yet when he telephoned, you had gone out?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I will tell you," said Joan Carew. "I could not bear to keep the little diamond chain in my room.

"I was terrified," continued Joan Carew. "I kept thinking: 'They must have found out by now. They will search everywhere.' I didn't reason. I lay in bed expecting to hear every moment a loud knocking on the door. Besides — the chain itself being there in my bedroom — her chain — the dead woman's chain — no, I couldn't endure it. I felt as if I had stolen it."

Joan Carew explained how she had risen, dressed, wrapped the chain in a pad of cotton-wool and enclosed it in an envelope. The envelope had not the stamp of the hotel upon it. It was a rather large envelope, one of a packet which she had bought in a crowded shop in Oxford Street on her way from Euston to the Semiramis. She had bought the envelopes of that particular size in order that when she sent her letter of introduction to the Director of the Opera at Covent Garden she might enclose with it a photograph.

"And to whom did you send it?" asked Mr. Ricardo.

"To Mrs. Blumen at the Semiramis. I printed the address carefully. Then I went out and posted it."

"Where?" Hanaud inquired.

"In the big letter-box of the Post Office at the corner of Trafalgar Square."

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Hanaud looked at the girl sharply.

"You had your wits about you, I see," he said.

"What if the envelope gets lost?" said Ricardo.

Hanaud laughed grimly.

"If one envelope is delivered at its address in London today, it will be that one," he said. "The news of the crime is published, you see," and he swung round to Joan. "Did you know that, Miss Carew?"

"No," she answered in an awe-stricken voice.

"Well, then, it is. Let us see what the special investigator has to say about it." And Hanaud, with a deliberation which Mr. Ricardo found quite excruciating, spread out the newspaper on the table.

There was only one new fact in the couple of columns devoted to the mystery. Mrs. Blumen had died from chloroform poisoning. She was of a stout habit, and the thieves were not skilled in the administration of the anesthetic.

"It's murder none the less," said Hanaud, and he gazed straight at Joan, asking her by the direct summons of his eyes what she was going to do.

"I must tell my story to the police," she replied, painfully and slowly.

Hanaud neither agreed nor differed. His face was blank, and when he spoke there was no cordiality in his voice. "Well," he asked, "and what is it that you have to say to the police, miss? That you went into the room to steal, and that you were attacked by two strangers, dressed as apaches, and masked? That is all?"

"Yes."

"And how many men at the Semiramis ball were dressed as apaches and wore masks? Come! Make a guess. A hundred at the least?"

"I should think so."

"Then what will your confession do beyond — I quote your English idiom — putting you in the coach?"

"Yet I think I must tell the police," she repeated, looking up and dropping her eyes again. Mr. Ricardo noticed that her eyelashes were very long. For the first time Hanaud's face relaxed.

"And I think you are quite right," he cried heartily, to Mr. Ricardo's surprise. "Tell them the truth before they suspect it, and they will help you out of the affair if they can. Not a doubt of it. Come, I will go with you myself to Scotland Yard."

"Thank you," said Joan, and the pair drove away in a cab together.

Hanaud returned to Grosvenor Square alone and lunched with Ricardo.

"It was all right," he said. "The police were very kind. Miss Joan Carew told her story to them as she had told it to us. Fortunately, the envelope with the platinum chain had already been delivered, and was in their hands. They were much mystified about it, but Miss Joan's story gave them a reasonable explanation. I think they are inclined to believe her; and if she is speaking the

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truth, they will keep her out of the witness-box if they can."

"She is to stay here in London, then?" asked Ricardo.

"Oh, yes; she is not to go. She will present her letters at the Opera House and secure an engagement, if she can. The criminals might be lulled thereby into a belief that the girl had kept the whole strange incident to herself, and that there was nowhere even a knowledge of the disguise which they had used." Hanaud spoke as carelessly as if the matter was not very important; and Ricardo, with an unusual flash of shrewdness, said:

"It is clear, my friend, that you do not think those two men will ever be caught at all."

Hanaud shrugged his shoulders.

"But," exclaimed Ricardo, "those pearls were of great value, and pearls of great value are known; so, when they come upon the market ——"

"That is true," Hanaud interrupted imperturbably. "But how are they known?"

"By their weight," said Mr. Ricardo.

"Exactly," replied Hanaud. "But did you not know that pearls can be peeled like an onion? No? It is true. Remove a skin, two skins, the weight is altered, the pearl is a trifle smaller. It has lost a little of its value, yes — but you can no longer identify it as the so-and-so pearl which belonged to this or that sultan, was stolen by the vizier, bought by Messrs. Lustre and Steinopolis, of Hatton Garden, and subsequently sold to the wealthy Mrs. Blumen. No, your pearl has vanished altogether. There is a new pearl which can be traded." He looked at Ricardo. "Who shall say that those pearls are not already in one of the queer little back streets of Amsterdam, undergoing their transformation?"

The days flew by. It was London's play-time. The green and gold of early summer deepened and darkened. Hanaud made acquaintance with the wooded reaches of the Thames; Joan Carew sang *Louise* at Covent Garden with notable success; and the affair of the Semiramis Hotel, in the minds of the few who remembered it, was already added to the long list of unfathomed mysteries.

But towards the end of May there occurred a startling development. Joan Carew wrote to Mr. Ricardo that she would call upon him in the afternoon, and she begged him to secure the presence of Hanaud. She came as the clock struck; she was pale and agitated; and in the room where Calladine had first told the story of her visit she told another story which, to Mr. Ricardo's thinking, was yet more strange.

"It has been going on for some time," she began. "I thought of coming to you at once. Then I wondered whether, if I waited — oh, you'll never believe me!"

"Let us hear," said Hanaud.

"I began to dream of that room, the two men disguised and masked, the still figure in the bed. Night after

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night! I was terrified to go to sleep. I felt the hand upon my mouth. I used to catch myself falling asleep, and walk about the room with all the lights up to keep myself awake. Oh, my nights were horrible until" — she paused and looked at her companions doubtfully — "until one night the mask slipped."

"What —?" cried Hanaud.

"It is true. The mask slipped on the face of one of the men — of the man who held me. Only a little way; it just left his forehead visible."

"Well?" asked Hanaud.

"I waked up," the girl continued, "in the darkness, and for a moment the whole scene remained vividly with me — for just long enough for me to fix clearly in my mind the figure of the apache with the white forehead showing above the mask."

"When was that?" asked Ricardo.

"A fortnight ago."

"Why didn't you come with your story then?"

"I waited," said Joan. "What I had to tell wasn't yet helpful. I thought that another night the mask might slip lower still. Besides, I — it is difficult to describe just what I felt. I felt it important just to keep that photograph in my mind, not to think about it, not to talk about it, not even to look at it too often lest I should begin to imagine the rest of the face and find something familiar in the man's carriage and shape when there was nothing really familiar to me at all. Do you understand that?"

"Yes," replied Hanaud.

"I thought there was a chance now — the strangest chance — that the truth might be reached. I did not wish to spoil it," and she turned eagerly to Ricardo, as if, having persuaded Hanaud, she would now turn her batteries on his companion. "My whole point of view was changed. I was no longer afraid of falling asleep lest I should dream. I wished to dream, but ——"

"But you could not," suggested Hanaud.

"No, that is the truth," replied Joan Carew. "Whereas before I was anxious to keep awake and yet must sleep from sheer fatigue, now that I tried consciously to put myself to sleep I remained awake all through the night, and only towards morning, when the light was coming through the blinds, dropped off into a heavy, dreamless slumber.

"Then came my rehearsals," Joan Carew continued, "and that wonderful opera drove everything else out of my head. I had such a chance, if only I could make use of it! When I went to bed now, I went with that haunting music in my ears — the call of Paris — oh, you must remember it. But can you realize what it must mean to a girl who is going to sing it for the first time in Covent Garden?"

Mr. Ricardo saw his opportunity. He, the connoisseur, could answer that question.

"It is true, my friend," he informed Hanaud with quiet authority. "The great march of events leaves the artist cold. He lives aloof. While the

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tumbrils thunder in the streets he adds a delicate tint to the picture he is engaged upon or recalls his triumph in his last great art."

"Thank you," said Hanaud gravely. "And now Miss Carew may perhaps resume her story."

"It was the very night of my début," she continued. "I had supper with some friends. A great artist, Carmen Valeri, honored me with her presence. I went home excited, and that night I dreamed again."

"Yes?"

"This time the chin, the lips, the eyes were visible. There was only a black strip across the middle of the face. And I thought — nay, I was sure — that if that strip vanished I should know the man."

"And it did vanish?"

"Three nights afterwards."

"And you did know the man?"

The girl's face became troubled.

"I knew the face, that was all," she answered. "I was disappointed. I had never spoken to the man. I am sure of that still. But somewhere I have seen him."

"You don't even remember when?" asked Hanaud.

"No." Joan Carew reflected for a moment with her eyes upon the carpet, and then flung up her head with a gesture of despair. "No. I try all the time to remember. But it is no good."

"How did you pass the evening of that night when you first dreamed complete the face of your assailant?"

Joan Carew reflected. Then her face cleared.

"I know," she exclaimed. "I was at the opera."

"And what was being given?"

"*The Jewels of the Madonna.*"

Hanaud nodded his head. To Ricardo it seemed that he had expected precisely that answer.

"Now," he continued, "you are sure that you have seen this man?"

"Yes."

"Very well," said Hanaud. "There is a game you play at children's parties — is there not? — animal, vegetable, or mineral, and always you get the answer. Let us play that game for a few minutes, you and I."

Joan Carew drew up her chair to the table and sat with her chin propped upon her hands and her eyes fixed on Hanaud's face. As he put each question she pondered on it and answered.

"You crossed on the *Lucania* from New York?"

"Yes."

"Picture to yourself the dining-room, the tables. You have the picture quite clear?"

"Yes."

"Was it at breakfast that you saw him?"

"No."

"At luncheon?"

"No."

"At dinner?"

"No."

"In the library, when you were writing letters, did you not one day lift your head and see him?"

"No."

"On the promenade deck? Did he

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pass you when you sat in your deck-chair?"

"No."

Step by step Hanaud took her back to New York to her hotel, to journeys in the train. Then he carried her to Milan where she had studied. It was extraordinary to Ricardo to realize how much Hanaud knew of the curriculum of a student aspiring to grand opera. From Milan he brought her again to New York, and at the last, with a start of joy, she cried: "Yes, it was there."

Hanaud took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead.

"Ouf!" he grunted. "To concentrate the mind on a day like this, it makes one hot, I can tell you. Now, Miss Carew, let us hear."

It was at a concert at the house of a Mrs. Starlingshield on Fifth Avenue and in the afternoon. Joan Carew sang. She was a stranger to New York and very nervous. She saw nothing but a mist of faces while she sang, but when she had finished the mist cleared, and as she left the improvised stage she saw the man. He was standing against the wall in a line of men. There was no particular reason why her eyes should single him out, except that he was paying no attention to her singing, and, indeed, she forgot him altogether afterwards.

"I just happened to see him clearly and distinctly," she said. "He was tall, clean-shaven, rather dark, not particularly young — thirty-five or so, I should say — a man with a heavy face and beginning to grow stout. He moved away while I was bowing to the audience, and I noticed him afterwards talking to people."

"Do you remember to whom?"

"No."

"Did he notice you, do you think?"

"I am sure he didn't," the girl replied emphatically.

She gave, so far as she could remember, the names of such guests and singers as she knew at that party. "And that is all," she said.

"Thank you," said Hanaud. "It is perhaps a good deal."

"You will let me hear from you?" she cried, as she rose to her feet.

"Miss Carew, I am at your service," he returned. She gave him her hand timidly and he took it cordially. For Mr. Ricardo she had merely a bow, a bow which recognized that he distrusted her and that she had no right to be offended. Then she went, and Hanaud smiled across the table at Ricardo.

"Yes," he said, "all that you are thinking is true enough. A man who slips out of society to indulge a passion for a drug in greater peace, a girl who, on her own confession, tried to steal, and, to crown all, this fantastic story. It is natural to disbelieve every word of it. But we disbelieved before, when we left Calladine's lodging in the Adelphi, and we were wrong."

"You have an idea?" exclaimed Ricardo.

"Perhaps!" said Hanaud. And he looked down the theatre column of the *Times*. "Let us distract ourselves by going to the theatre."

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"You are the most irritating man!" Mr. Ricardo broke out impulsively. "If I had to paint your portrait, I should paint you with your finger against the side of your nose, saying mysteriously: 'I know,' when you know nothing at all."

Hanaud made a schoolboy's grimace. "We will go and sit in your box at the opera tonight," he said.

They reached Covent Garden before the curtain rose. Mr. Ricardo's box was on the lowest tier and next to the omnibus box.

"We are near the stage," said Hanaud, as he took his seat in the corner and so arranged the curtain that he could see and yet was hidden from view. "I like that."

The theatre was full; stalls and boxes shimmered with jewels and satin, and all that was famous that season for beauty and distinction had made its tryst there that night.

"Yes, this is wonderful," said Hanaud. "What opera do they play?" He glanced at his program and cried, with a little start of surprise: "We are in luck. It is *The Jewels of the Madonna*."

"Do you believe in omens?" Mr. Ricardo asked coldly. He had not yet recovered from his rebuff of the afternoon.

"No, but I believe that Carmen Valeri is at her best in this part," said Hanaud.

Mr. Ricardo belonged to that body of critics which must needs spoil your enjoyment by comparisons and recollections of other great artists. He was at a disadvantage certainly tonight, for the opera was new. But he did his best. He imagined others in the part, and when the great scene came at the end of the second act, and Carmen Valeri, on obtaining from her lover the jewels stolen from the sacred image, gave such a display of passion as fairly enthralled that audience, Mr. Ricardo sighed quietly and patiently.

"How Calvé would have brought out the psychological value of that scene!" he murmured; and he was quite vexed with Hanaud, who sat with his opera glasses held to his eyes, and every sense apparently concentrated on the stage. The curtains rose and rose again when the act was concluded, and still Hanaud sat motionless as the Sphinx, staring through his glasses.

"That is all," said Ricardo when the curtains fell for the fifth time.

"They will come out," said Hanaud. "Wait!" And from between the curtains Carmen Valeri was led out into the full glare of the footlights. Then at last Hanaud put down his glasses and turned to Ricardo with a look of exultation and genuine delight.

"What a night!" said Hanaud. "What a wonderful night!" And he applauded until he split his gloves. At the end of the opera he cried: "We will go and take supper at the Semiramis. Yes, my friend, we will finish our evening like gallant gentlemen. Come!"

In spite of his boast, however, Hanaud hardly touched his supper, and he played with, rather than

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drank, his brandy and soda. He sat with his back to the wall watching the groups which poured in. Suddenly his face lighted up.

"Here is Carmen Valeri!" he cried. "Once more we are in luck. Is it not that she is beautiful?"

Mr. Ricardo turned languidly about in his chair and put up his eyeglass.

"So, so," he said.

"Ah!" returned Hanaud. "Then her companion will interest you still more. For he is the man who murdered Mrs. Blumen."

Mr. Ricardo jumped so that his eyeglass fell and tinkled on its cord against the buttons of his waistcoat.

"What!" he exclaimed. "It's impossible!" He looked again. "Certainly the man fits Joan Carew's description. But—" He turned back to Hanaud utterly astounded. And as he looked at the Frenchman all his earlier recollections of him, of his swift deductions, of the subtle imagination which his heavy body so well concealed, crowded in upon Ricardo and convinced him.

"How long have you known?" he asked in a whisper of awe.

"Since ten o'clock tonight."

"But you will have to find the necklace before you can prove it."

"The necklace!" said Hanaud carelessly. "That is already found."

Mr. Ricardo had been longing for a thrill. He had it now.

"It's found?" he said in a startled whisper.

"Yes."

Ricardo turned again, with as much indifference as he could assume, towards the couple who were settling down at their table, the man with a surly indifference, Carmen Valeri with the radiance of a woman who has just achieved a triumph and is now free to enjoy the fruits of it. Confusedly, recollections returned to Ricardo of questions put that afternoon by Hanaud to Joan Carew — subtle questions into which the name of Carmen Valeri was continually entering. She was a woman of thirty, certainly beautiful, with a clear, pale face and eyes like the night.

"Then she is implicated too!" he said. What a change for her, he thought, from the stage of Covent Garden to the felon's cell.

"She!" exclaimed Hanaud; and in his passion for the contrasts of drama Ricardo was almost disappointed. "She has nothing whatever to do with it. She knows nothing. André Favart there — yes. But Carmen Valeri! She's as stupid as an owl, and loves him beyond words. Do you want to know how stupid she is? You shall know. I asked Mr. Clements, the director of the opera house, to take supper with us, and here he is."

Hanaud stood up and shook hands with the director. He was of the world of business rather than of art, and long experience of the ways of tenors and primadonnas had given him a good-humored cynicism.

"They are spoilt children, all tantrums and vanity," he said, "and they would ruin you to keep a rival out of the theatre."

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He told them anecdote upon anecdote.

"And Carmen Valeri," Hanaud asked in a pause. "Is she troublesome this season?"

"Has been," replied Clements dryly. "At present she is playing at being good. But she gave me a turn some weeks ago." He turned to Ricardo. "Superstition's her trouble, and André Favart knows it. She left him behind in America this spring."

"America!" suddenly cried Ricardo; so suddenly that Clements looked at him in surprise.

"She was singing in New York, of course, during the winter," he returned. "Well, she left him behind, and I was shaking hands with myself when he began to deal the cards over there. She came to me in a panic. She had just had a cable. She couldn't sing on Friday night. There was a black knave next to the nine of diamonds. She wouldn't sing for worlds. And it was the first night of *The Jewels of the Madonna!* Imagine the fix I was in!"

"What did you do?" asked Ricardo.

"The only thing there was to do," replied Clements with a shrug of the shoulders. "I cabled Favart some money and he dealt the cards again. She came to me beaming. Oh, she had been so distressed to put me in the cart! But what could she do? Now there was a red queen next to the ace of hearts, so she could sing without a scruple so long, of course, as she didn't pass a funeral on the way down to the opera house. Luckily she didn't. But my money brought Favart over here, and now I'm living on a volcano. For he's the greatest scoundrel unhung. He never has a farthing, however much she gives him; he's a blackmailer, a swindler, has no manners and no graces, looks like a butcher and treats her as if she were dirt, never goes near the opera except when she is singing in this part, and she worships the ground he walks on. Well, I suppose it's time to go."

The lights had been turned off, the great room was emptying. Mr. Ricardo and his friends rose to go, but at the door Hanaud detained Mr. Clements, and they talked together alone for some little while, greatly to Mr. Ricardo's annoyance. Hanaud's good humor, however, when he rejoined his friend, was enough for two.

"I apologize, my friend, with my hand on my heart. But it was for your sake that I stayed behind. You have a meretricious taste for melodrama which I deeply deplore, but which I mean to gratify. I ought to leave for Paris tomorrow, but I shall not. I shall stay until Thursday."

Mr. Ricardo bubbled with questions, but he knew his man. He would get no answer to any of them tonight. So he worked out the problem for himself as he lay awake in his bed, and he came down to breakfast next morning fatigued but triumphant. Hanaud was already chipping off the top of his egg at the table.

"So I see you have found it all out, my friend," he said.

"Not all," replied Ricardo mod-

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estly, "and you will not mind, I am sure, if I follow the usual custom and wish you a good morning."

"Not at all," said Hanaud. "I am all for good manners myself. But I am longing to hear the line of your reasoning."

Mr. Ricardo did not need much pressing.

"Joan Carew saw André Favart at Mrs. Starlingshield's party, and saw him with Carmen Valeri. For Carmen Valeri was there. I remember that you asked Joan for the names of the artists who sang, and Carmen Valeri was among them."

Hanaud nodded his head.

"No doubt Joan Carew noticed Carmen Valeri particularly, and so took unconsciously into her mind an impression of the man who was with her, André Favart — of his build, of his walk, of his type."

Again Hanaud agreed.

"She forgets the man altogether, but the picture remains latent in her mind — an undeveloped film.

"Then came the tragic night at the Semiramis. She does not consciously recognize her assailant, but she dreams the scene again and again, and by a process of unconscious cerebration the figure of the man becomes familiar. Finally she makes her début, is entertained at supper afterwards, and meets once more Carmen Valeri."

"Yes, for the first time since Mrs. Starlingshield's party," interjected Hanaud.

"She dreams again, she remembers asleep more than she remembers when awake. The presence of Carmen Valeri at her supper-party has its effect. By a process of association she recalls Favart, and the mask slips on the face of her assailant. Some days later she goes to the opera. She hears Carmen Valeri sing in *The Jewels of the Madonna*. No doubt the passion of her acting, which I am more prepared to acknowledge this morning than I was last night, affects Joan Carew powerfully, emotionally. She goes to bed with her head full of Carmen Valeri, and she dreams not of Carmen Valeri, but of the man who is unconsciously associated with Carmen Valeri in her thoughts. The mask vanishes altogether. She sees her assailant now, has his portrait limned in her mind."

"Yes," said Hanaud. "It is curious the brain working while the body sleeps, the dream revealing what thought cannot recall."

Mr. Ricardo was delighted. He was taken seriously.

"But of course," he said, "I could not have worked the problem out but for you. You knew of André Favart and the kind of man he was."

Hanaud laughed.

"Yes. That is always my one little advantage. I know all the cosmopolitan blackguards of Europe." His laughter ceased suddenly, and he brought his clenched fist heavily down upon the table. "Here is one of them who will be very well out of the world, my friend," he said very quietly.

For a few moments there was

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silence. Then Ricardo asked: "But have you evidence enough?"

"Yes."

"Your two chief witnesses, Calladine and Joan Carew — you said it yourself — there are facts to discredit them. Will they be believed?"

"But they won't appear in the case at all," Hanaud said. "Wait, wait!" and once more he smiled. "By the way, what is the number of Calladine's house?"

Ricardo gave it, and Hanaud thereupon wrote a letter. "It is all for your sake, my friend," he chuckled.

"Nonsense," said Ricardo. "You have the spirit of the theatre in your bones."

"Well, I shall not deny it," said Hanaud, and he sent out the letter to the nearest pillar-box.

Mr. Ricardo waited in a fever of impatience until Thursday came. At breakfast Hanaud would talk of nothing but the news of the day. At luncheon he was no better. The affair of the Semiramis Hotel seemed a thousand miles from his thoughts. But at five o'clock he said as he drank his tea:

"You know, of course, that we go to the opera tonight?"

"Yes. Do we?"

"Yes. Your young friend Calladine, by the way, will join us in your box."

"That is very kind of him, I am sure," said Mr. Ricardo.

The two men arrived before the rising of the curtain, and in the crowded lobby a stranger spoke a few words to Hanaud, but what he said Ricardo could not hear. They took their seats in the box, and Hanaud looked at his program.

"Ah! It is *Il Ballo de Maschera* tonight. We always seem to hit upon something appropriate, don't we?"

Then he raised his eyebrows.

"Oh-o! Do you see that our pretty young friend, Joan Carew, is singing in the rôle of the page? It is a showy part. There is a particular melody with a long-sustained trill in it. By the way, I should let Calladine find it all out for himself."

Mr. Ricardo nodded sagely.

"Yes. That is wise. I had thought of it myself." But he had done nothing of the kind. He was only aware that the elaborate stage-management in which Hanaud delighted was working out to the desired climax, whatever that climax might be. Calladine entered the box a few minutes later and shook hands with them awkwardly.

"It was kind of you to invite me," he said and, very ill at ease, he took a seat between them.

"There's the overture," said Hanaud. The curtains divided and were festooned on either side of the stage. The singers came on in their turn; the page appeared to a burst of delicate applause (Joan Carew had made a small name for herself that season), and with a stifled cry Calladine shot back in the box as if he had been struck. Even then Mr. Ricardo did not understand. He only realized that Joan Carew was looking extraordinarily trim and smart in her boy's dress. He had to look from his pro-

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gram to the stage and back again several times before the reason of Calladine's exclamation dawned on him. When it did, he was horrified. Hanaud, in his craving for dramatic effects, must have lost his head altogether. Joan Carew was wearing, from the ribbon in her hair to the scarlet heels of her buckled satin shoes, the same dress as she had worn on the tragic night at the Semiramis Hotel. He leaned forward in his agitation to Hanaud.

"You must be mad. Suppose Favart is in the theatre and sees her. He'll be over on the Continent by one in the morning."

"No, he won't," replied Hanaud. "For one thing, he never comes to Covent Garden unless one opera, with Carmen Valeri in the chief part, is being played, as you heard the other night at supper. For a second thing, he isn't in the house. I know where he is. He is gambling in Dean Street, Soho. For a third thing, my friend, he couldn't leave by the nine o'clock train for the Continent if he wanted to. Arrangements have been made. For a fourth thing, he wouldn't wish to. He has really remarkable reasons for desiring to stay in London. But he will come to the theatre later. Clements will send him an urgent message, with the result that he will go straight to Clements's office. Meanwhile, we can enjoy ourselves, eh?"

Never was the difference between the amateur dilettante and the genuine professional more clearly exhibited than by the behavior of the two men during the rest of the performance. Mr. Ricardo might have been sitting on a coal fire from his jumps and twistings; Hanaud stolidly enjoyed the music, and when Joan Carew sang her famous solo his hands clamored for an encore. Certainly, whether excitement was keeping her up or no, Joan Carew had never sung better in her life. Her voice was clear and fresh as a bird's — a bird with a soul inspiring its song. Even Calladine drew his chair forward again and sat with his eyes fixed upon the stage and quite carried out of himself. He drew a deep breath at the end.

"She is wonderful," he said.

"We will go round to the back of the stage," said Hanaud.

They passed through the iron door and across the stage to a long corridor with a row of doors on one side. There were two or three men standing about in evening dress, as if waiting for friends in the dressing-rooms. At the third door Hanaud stopped and knocked. The door was opened by Joan Carew, still dressed in her green and gold. Her face was troubled, her eyes afraid.

"Courage, little one," said Hanaud, and he slipped past her into the room. "It is as well that my ugly, familiar face should not be seen too soon."

The door closed and one of the strangers loitered along the corridor and spoke to a call-boy. The call-boy ran off. For five minutes more Mr. Ricardo waited with a beating heart. He had the joy of a man in the centre of things. All those people

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driving homewards in their motor-cars along the Strand — how he pitied them! Then, at the end of the corridor, he saw Clements and André Favart. They approached, discussing the possibility of Carmen Valeri's appearance in London opera during the next season.

"We have to look ahead, my dear friend," said Clements, "and though I should be extremely sorry ——"

At that moment they were exactly opposite Joan Carew's door. It opened, she came out; with a nervous movement she shut the door behind her. At the sound André Favart turned, and he saw up against the panels of the door, with a look of terror in her face, the same gay figure which had interrupted him in Mrs. Blumen's bedroom.

Favart stared and uttered an oath. His ace turned white; he staggered back, as if he had seen a ghost. Then he made a wild dash along the corridor, and was seized and held by two of the men in evening dress. Favart recovered his wits. He ceased to struggle.

"What does this outrage mean?" he asked, and one of the men drew a warrant and notebook from his pocket.

"You are arrested for the murder of Mrs. Blumen in the Semiramis Hotel," he said, "and I have to warn you that anything you may say will be taken down and may be used in evidence against you."

"Preposterous!" exclaimed Favart. "There's a mistake. We will go along to the police and put it right. Where's your evidence against me?"

Hanaud stepped out of the doorway of the dressing-room.

"In the property-room of the theatre," he said.

At the sight of him Favart uttered a violent cry of rage. "You are here, too, are you?" and he sprang at Hanaud's throat. Hanaud stepped lightly aside. Favart was borne down to the ground, and when he stood up again the handcuffs were on his wrists.

Favart was led away, and Hanaud turned to Ricardo and Clements.

"Let us go to the property-room," he said. They passed along the corridor, and Ricardo noticed that Calladine was no longer with them. He turned and saw him standing outside Joan Carew's dressing-room. In the property-room there was already a detective in plain clothes.

"What is it you really want, sir?" the property-master asked of the director.

"Only the jewels of the Madonna," Hanaud answered.

The property-master unlocked a cupboard and took from it the sparkling cuirass. Hanaud pointed to it, and there, lost among the huge glittering stones of paste and false pearls, Mrs. Blumen's necklace was entwined.

"Then that is why Favart came always to Covent Garden when *The Jewels of the Madonna* was being performed!" exclaimed Ricardo.

Hanaud nodded.

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"He came to watch over his treasure."

Ricardo was piecing together the sections of the puzzle.

"No doubt he knew of the necklace in America. No doubt he followed it to England."

"But to hide them here!" cried Mr. Clements. "He must have been mad."

"Why?" asked Hanaud. "Can you imagine a safer hiding place? Who is going to burgle the property-room of Covent Garden? Who is going to look for a priceless string of pearls among the stage jewels of an opera house?"

"You did," said Mr. Ricardo.

"I?" replied Hanaud, shrugging his shoulders. "Joan Carew's dreams led me to André Favart. The first time we came here and saw the pearls of the Madonna, I was on the lookout, naturally. I noticed those pearls through my opera glasses."

"At the end of the second act?" cried Ricardo suddenly. "I remember now."

"Yes," replied Hanaud. "But for that second act the pearls would have stayed comfortably here all through the season. Carmen Valeri — a fool as I told you — would have tossed them about in her dressing-room without a notion of their value, and at the end of July, when the murder at the Semiramis Hotel had been forgotten, Favart would have taken them to Amsterdam and made his bargain."

They left the theatre together and walked down to the grill-room of the Semiramis. But as Hanaud looked through the glass door he turned and drew back.

"We will not go in, I think, eh?"

"Why?" asked Ricardo.

Hanaud pointed to a table. Calladine and Joan Carew were seated at it taking their supper.

"Perhaps," said Hanaud with a smile, "perhaps, my friend — what? Who shall say that the rooms in the Adelphi will not be given up?"

They turned away from the hotel. But Hanaud was right, and before the season was over Mr. Ricardo had to put his hand in his pocket for a wedding present.

SPECIAL BINDER OFFER

Because of the large number of reader requests, *ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE* has now procured a supply of strong, handsome binders for your copies of *EQMM*. Each binder holds one complete volume, that is, six issues of the magazine. It is easy to use, handy, convenient, and economical. The price is $1.00 postpaid. Send your order and remittance to: Special Binder Dept., Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22.

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THE WRONG GUY

By SAMUEL W. TAYLOR

IT was already Monday morning when we got the note from Charles Moore, the cement man, that he'd be arriving Monday and to have his place ready. So my partner, Sid Goodrich, dashed out to unlock the place while I got on the 'phone to locate some help. For all his money, Charles Moore didn't keep a permanent staff.

Sid was opening the windows to air the house out, when he saw a couple of men walk in. They were rather dumb-looking characters, but what can you expect on short notice with help these days? "Get busy," Sid said. "Grab them slip covers. Let's get this place looking like somebody lived here."

One of the characters drew a gun from his coat pocket and said, "O.K., pal, you're coming with us."

"No argument," Sid agreed hurriedly. "But why?"

"Because I say so. I'm the wrong guy to ask questions of."

Sid went out to their car. They drove into the hills and put a blindfold on him. He kept saying, "There's some mistake," but they didn't seem to hear him.

They drove him around an hour or so, turning this way and that until he lost all sense of direction. They stopped, helped him out, led him into a house and took off the blindfold. It was a tumbledown place with the plaster falling off, holes in the floor, and plumbing that wouldn't work. The only kind of house you'd find vacant these days. The blinds were drawn and he wasn't allowed near the windows.

"Now what?" Sid asked.

"You write a note telling the right party to put a hundred thousand dollars in a certain place."

"I'll write the note," Sid said, "but you can't get blood out of a turnip."

"We know you're tight. But this time you'll cough up."

"Say, who do you think I am?"

"And none of that routine, Moore."

Sid began laughing.

"Hell, boys, you got the wrong party. I'm Sid Goodrich — Patterson and Goodrich; realty, rentals, estate agents. I was just out opening the place up before Moore arrived."

"Very smart, pal. But it just happened we got the lowdown. You're filthy with dough, but you hate to spend it. You've been wintering in Santa Barbara and you're due back this morning. You drive an old beat-up car. You don't keep a permanent staff of servants while you're away. We walked in and you told us to get to work, like we was from the employment agency."

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"Why, you've never even seen Charles Moore," Sid said. "If that ain't smart!"

"You don't think we'd be dumb enough to do it if you knew us?"

"No wonder crooks get caught," Sid said.

"You better button that lip, pal."

"Depends on how you look at it, how smart we are," the other character chipped in. "Know what's the matter with most jobs like this? Too much casing. Too many plans. Too many people in on it. This is simple, see? We just happened into a certain place and overheard a party tell another party about Charles Moore. It hit us that quick. So we just got in a parked car that somebody had left the keys in, we drove around and located an empty house, we went to your place and picked you up, and by tonight the deal's buttoned up. Tomorrow they find you, they find the car, and they don't find us. No clues. Who's smart?"

"Write that note," the other character said. "Now, we want the money left on that hill east of town."

"That's Ashton hill," Sid said.

"O.K. Put it in. We want the dough in fives, tens, and twenties, with no marks and no consecutive serial numbers. We want a car to go up the road exactly at noon and toss out the dough and keep on going. And we don't want to see any planes overhead or any other cars on that road until sundown. Or else."

"O.K.," Sid said, writing. "What road? Lots of roads in the hills."

"The road which goes around the right of the hill when you drive out from town."

"That's Woodside Road," Sid said.

"O.K. Put that in."

"O.K.," Sid said. "But I tell you, I'm the wrong guy."

"Shut up. Now, who can deliver?"

"Why, I guess the estate agents, Patterson and Goodrich."

"O.K. Address it to them."

And so along about ten thirty a kid brought me a letter asking for a hundred thousand dollars. It was signed "Charles Moore" but it was Sid's handwriting. I called Moore on the phone just to check. Moore said he was in no humor for a joke. Why wasn't Sid there when he arrived? So I called the sheriff, and he arrived with two cars full of guys he'd sworn in as deputies.

"But there ain't no Ashton Hill around here," the sheriff said.

"No," I said, "but the old Ashton place is on Woodside Road."

So we all went out and rescued Sid. The deputies were disappointed. There wasn't any excitement at all.

The two characters were rather crestfallen.

"As if a real-estate man didn't know the inside of every house for miles around," Sid told them scornfully. "And especially the only house in the whole county too rundown to be rented. You're so dumb I sort of feel sorry for you, in a way. But it's your fault. I told you I was the wrong guy."

"Brother," one of them agreed feelingly, "you certainly was."

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Larry Blochman's "A Life for a Life" has, we think, an interesting and significant history. The story was written in 1934, the year after Hitler established his totalitarian Third Reich. Apparently this was too early for the implications of the Nazi terror to appeal to American editors as fiction material — the manuscript was turned down by every magazine editor Mr. Blochman could think of sending it to, and it remained a "rejection" for three long years. Finally, in 1937, the editor of "Argosy" saw more in the story than first met the eye, and published it . . . Mr. Blochman now writes that he is pleasantly surprised to find this old short-short of his resurrected, and on rereading it thinks the message is just as pertinent today as it was when he first wrote it fifteen years ago. We wholeheartedly agree . . .

A LIFE FOR A LIFE

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

THE Pont des Arts is popular among those seeking oblivion in the Seine because the balustrade is not very high. Hardly a week passes but some dreary, despondent soul goes there to fling himself into eternity — threadbare, broken men, most of them, or hysterical women. Dixon was neither threadbare nor hysterical. He was well-dressed, still young, and the fingers which held his cigarette were carefully manicured. Yet it was obvious to the dark, angular man in the slouch hat, who had been waiting at the Right Bank approach to the bridge since nightfall, that Dixon was intent on suicide. Perhaps there was a characteristic suicidal droop to his neatly-tailored shoulders. . . .

At the middle of the bridge Dixon threw his cigarette away, leaned his hands on the parapet, and raised his head for a final look at the world. Upstream the lights of the Pont Neuf stared back at him; the red and white reflections squirmed on the sluggish blackness of the river. He flexed his knees slightly, preparatory to hurdling the last obstacle this side of death. But he did not jump. The bow of a tug slid out from under the span directly below him. A cloud of sparks swirled upward from the broken stump of a smokestack which had been folded back to clear the bridge. Dixon realized that he would only land on one of the string of barges.

The dark man in the slouch hat had been walking rapidly toward Dixon. Now he sprang into a run. He caught Dixon's arm.

"*Monsieur! Je vous en prie!*"

Dixon turned on him savagely.

"Let go of me! What right—"

"Every right, *monsieur*." The man switched instantly to English. "I

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have been waiting for you for days. Come with me."

"I won't let you interfere —"

"I do not intend to interfere with *monsieur's* desire to die. All I ask is a delay of ten, fifteen minutes. My only wish is that *monsieur's* death shall be of use. Come?"

Dixon did not answer, but his fingers suddenly curled into a fist. The man in the slouch hat saw the fist and tightened his grip on Dixon's arm.

"Very well," he said. "If you will not let me assist you to die, then I will call a *sergeant de ville* — who will insist that you live. Come?"

With a listless shrug Dixon yielded. The man in the slouch hat hailed a taxi and drove with him to a dingy café near the Place de la Bastille. In the smoky backroom of the café, five men sat around a table. They were not the usual Frenchmen who played *belotte* in the backrooms of Paris *bistros*. Even Dixon could tell they were foreigners.

"I have found him, Uzak," said the man with the slouch hat.

The man addressed as Uzak had a soft, brown beard that curled close to his face. As he held out his hand, his glance struck Dixon like a blast of fire. His eyes were strangely vital, burning with fierce earnestness. Four other pairs of eyes converging on the newcomer, even those peering through thick lenses, gleamed with the same fanatical light. In contrast, Dixon's eyes were dull and empty. Something had gone out of them, as though part of him were already dead.

"Welcome," said Uzak. "For a week we have been watching the bridges for a man who wants to die. Is a woman the cause?"

"What difference?" asked Dixon. A woman? There had been too many women. Three divorced wives. Countless others. All alike, all unimportant.

"Money, then," said Uzak. "You are a ruined gambler?"

Dixon's handsome, dissipated face might have been that of a gambler. But gambling bored him. Money bored him. He had had too much of it, too easily. The things it would buy no longer amused him. All his life he had played, until he was played out. His senses and desires were jaded. Travel was stupid. Same faces at the bars in Calcutta as in Cairo or Chicago; same drinks; same headache every morning. A deadly sameness. There was nothing more to live for. Life bored him.

"See here," he said. "If you only want to pry —"

"Please, please!" said Uzak quickly. "I come to the point. We are all exiles here. We are lovers of liberty. Our own beloved country is in the hands of a tyrant. For freedom's sake, the tyrant must die. But the man who kills the tyrant will himself be killed. It is inevitable. That is why we have sought a man to whom life has lost its meaning. That is why we want you. You will assassinate the tyrant."

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A glimmer of interest flickered in Dixon's once-lifeless eyes.

"Afraid?" he asked with a faint smile. "You're all afraid to die — even for your cause?"

"No!" replied Uzak emphatically. "But it is more important that we live for our country than die for it. Unless there is organization to take over and advance the cause of freedom when the tyrant dies, then his assassination is futile. We are that organization."

Dixon's faint smile persisted as he said: "I can't give up my plans to help half a dozen strangers. The Seine —"

"But we do not ask you to help us!" Uzak protested. "You would help humanity! You would help millions of oppressed people who today are afraid to talk above a whisper!"

Uzak leaned forward tensely until his beard was very close to Dixon's face. His feverish zeal flamed brighter in his compelling eyes as he began his passionate story of a nation in thralldom. He spoke movingly of the tyrant's bloody intolerance, of dissenters hideously murdered, of men torn from their homes at midnight to be tortured in sound-proof cellars, of families destroyed. His words were eloquent with the crunch of bludgeon on bruised flesh, the crackle of rifle fire, the wail of bereaved women, the hushed fear of millions awaiting emancipation.

The café clock, barely visible in the thickening tobacco haze, ticked on endlessly. Cigarette stubs piled higher and higher in ashtrays. The chill of approaching dawn seeped into the room. Uzak was still talking of the bleeding body of liberty, awaiting resurrection through the death of the tyrant.

Dixon listened without interruption. His hands, no longer listless, were clasped tightly on the table. The droop had gone out of his shoulders. Little by little the dullness faded from his eyes, until they seemed to reflect the half-mad light of enthusiasm from Uzak's. At three o'clock a waiter came into the room.

"*On ferme, messieurs,*" said the waiter. "We are closing."

Dixon leaped to his feet. He wrung Uzak's hand.

"You win," he said. "You've converted me."

Uzak pressed a small pistol into Dixon's palm. "Brother!" he exclaimed. "Our people will thank you. Unborn generations will praise you. Jon will take you to the station. He will put you on the morning train."

Dixon shook his head.

"You've converted me," he repeated, "so completely, that I don't want to die — not even for the cause. Like you, I want to work for it, live for it!"

When night came again. Dixon was back at the Pont des Arts. He and the man with the slouch hat lingered at the approach to the bridge, waiting for another prospective suicide, for a man with the courage to die and without the will to live.

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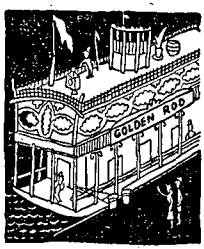
WINNER OF A FOURTH PRIZE: KELLEY ROOS



William Roos was born in Pittsburgh in 1911. A few years later Audrey Kelley was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Eighteen years after that the boy met the girl in the Drama School at Carnegie Institute of Technology, and they've seen a great deal of each other ever since . . . Bill and Audrey started their big adventure together with the determination to become another Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. The two highlights in their histrionic career did little to change their wishful thinking into wish fulfillment. The engagement on the good ship "Golden Rod," Captain Menke's showboat anchored at the foot of Stanwyck Street, Pittsburgh, had one audience of exactly nine people; when the audience numbered less than five, the performance was called off — the company had some pride. Later, in New York, after months of haunting casting offices, Bill and Audrey got their first chance on Broadway — on Broadway and 10th Street; the one-act play in which they starred was given in a church, before a women's auxiliary — and as Mark Twain closed Chapter IV in THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER, *"Let us draw the curtain of charity over the rest of the scene."*

Except that Bill Roos could no more give up the theatre, or some phase of it, than he could give up breathing. He wrote a play, and on the strength of that, Bill and Audrey got married. Nothing came of the play, but something came of the marriage — two children, and a husband-and-wife team of detective-story writers.

They joined hearts, hands, heads — and handles. Take Audrey's maiden name, Kelley, and Bill's surname, Roos — and there you have it, Kelley Roos. They wrote their first mystery in 1938. They had read somewhere that the average first mystery earned $500. They thought they would write an average first mystery and make $500. It didn't work out that way — some unknown statistician had doublecrossed them. But the second Haila and Jeff Troy story was purchased by "American" — and since then all sleuthing statistics have been overwhelmingly in their favor.

But Bill Roos kept on writing plays. One ran for five nights on Broadway, but glory be, it sold to Hollywood. Another — an adaptation of Bellamy Partridge's JANUARY THAW *— played nine weeks on The Main Stem. And now, as if you didn't know, there is "As the Girls Go" — a Michael Todd Production, starring Bobby Clark with Irene Rich, Music by Jimmie McHugh, Lyrics by Harold Adamson — and Book by William*

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Roos. "As the Girls Go" is one of the big hits of the 1948–1949 season. For EQMM's Fourth Annual Contest, Kelley Roos submitted "Two Over Par" — the first Haila and Jeff Troy combined criminological operation in the short-story length. Here, in Will Cuppy's deathless description, is "Murder Without Tears" . . .

TWO OVER PAR

by KELLEY ROOS

JEFF stepped back from teeing up my ball and handed me the family driver. I kept my head down and swung. The ball, obviously a faulty one, curved into a thicket not far away. Jeff teed his ball, kept his head down, and swung. His ball sliced into the same thicket. The Troys, as they say around the club, were in the rough.

"Are you sure," I said, "that you're really supposed to keep your head down?"

"I don't know," Jeff said dismally. "But I couldn't raise mine now even if I wanted to. I'm too ashamed."

"Those are our last two balls."

"Yeah." Jeff picked up our bag, slung it over his shoulder. "If we didn't spend so much money on balls we could afford a caddy."

"Couldn't we alternate? Hire a caddy one day, use balls the next?"

"Women," Jeff said, "shouldn't be allowed on a golf course."

We trudged toward the thicket and plunged into it. We separated and began looking for our balls. It wasn't very interesting work. Perhaps I had done too much of it in this week since we had taken up golf. I kicked aimlessly at the thick grass as I walked around, I . . .

"Jeff!"

"Did you find your ball?" Jeff yelled.

"No," I said. "No, I . . . I found a caddy!"

Then Jeff was at my side. He saw what I had seen. He crouched down beside the young man, reaching for his wrist. But he didn't test his pulse; he didn't need to. As Jeff touched the arm, the body rolled onto its back and we saw the bullet hole in Eddie Riorden's head.

I turned away. "I'll go back to the clubhouse. I'll phone . . ."

"Wait," Jeff said.

He moved deeper into the thicket. I had taken one step after him when he stopped. I saw his shoulders go rigid. Then he turned and came back to me.

He took me by the arm and led me out onto the fairway.

"Jeff," I said, "what is it? What did you see?"

"Eddie was caddying for Mrs. Carleton."

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"For Mrs. . . . Oh," I said.

"Yes. Just like Eddie. Shot through the head."

I never got it straight just what Joe Hinkle's official title was — chief of police, sheriff, constable, what? But when murder was committed at the Ocean Country Club on Long Island, Joe Hinkle was the man who represented the law. He was a pleasant, large-faced man. He seemed a little put out that there had been two murders; he seemed to feel that somebody had overdone it.

Joe talked to Jeff and me in a private dining room off the club's bar. He kept looking over our heads toward the bar. I got the impression that Joe would have liked to forget the whole thing and have a drink, then another, followed by a few more — even though it was still only nine thirty A. M.

Joe Hinkle sighed and put the palms of his hands on the bare dining table. He looked at us.

"You found the bodies," he said.

"We're sorry," Jeff said.

"That's all right." The policeman sighed again. "If you hadn't, somebody else would have. You two play golf pretty early in the morning."

"We're self-conscious about our golf," I explained.

"Was there anyone else on the course while you were playing?"

"We didn't see anyone," I said.

"What difference would that make?" Jeff asked. "It looked to me as though Mrs. Carleton and Eddie had been lying there all night long."

"Yeah, that's right," Joe said. "Doc Grandle says they been dead about twelve hours or so. That's what I figure, too. It gets dark around nine these nights. So Mrs. Carleton was playing her round of golf some time before then. I expect to set the time of the shooting pretty close by asking questions around the club. I wish whoever did it would confess."

"I wouldn't bank on that," Jeff said.

"No, I guess I shouldn't. If I killed two people, I wouldn't admit it." Joe slouched down in his chair and closed his eyes. "Mrs. Carleton and Eddie Riorden. Who would have a motive to kill them two? I figure nobody would. I figure that the killer shot Eddie, then had to shoot Mrs. Carleton, too, because she was a witness to Eddie's murder. Or vice versa. By that I mean, there is the alternative that Mrs. Carleton was the intended victim, and Eddie the innocent bystander. How does that sound to you, Troy?"

"Logical," Jeff said.

"I'm glad to hear you say that. You've had some experience with murder cases, I understand."

"A little," Jeff admitted.

"Well, that's more than I've had. Thank the Lord."

Jeff said, "Did you find anything interesting in that thicket?"

"We found Eddie's cap. And Mrs. Carleton's golf bag. That's about all so far."

"You must have found a lot of

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balls. Mrs. Carleton and Haila and I aren't the only ones with a slice around here."

"You're right. We did find some balls." Hinkle extracted three balls from his jacket pocket and rolled them across the table to Jeff. "Maybe one of them belongs to you."

"This one is Haila's. Mine isn't here." Jeff looked closely at the third one. "This ball's monogrammed. L.K."

"Yeah, probably Louis Kling. I'll see he gets it. All Mrs. Carleton's balls are initialed, too. J.T.C. We found two of them in her bag, still wrapped in tissue paper."

Jeff said, "You didn't find the ball she was playing with?"

"Not yet. We haven't had much time to do any real looking around in that thicket. I'm having the place roped off for a hundred yards around the spot the bodies were. I plan to have the boys go through it with a fine-comb."

"That's the idea," Jeff said. "With a fine-comb."

"I hope we find more than a bunch of golf balls." Hinkle heaved another of his sighs. "I wish we'd find a gun with the killer's fingerprints on it. I'd like that — that'd be nice, wouldn't it?"

"It would even be rather surprising," Jeff said. "Did you know Eddie Riorden?"

"Sure. Everybody knew Eddie. He was our high-school football hero four or five years ago. Eddie must be about twenty-two now and as far as I know he never did a lick of work except enough to keep him in cigarette money. Caddying, pin boy — that kind of stuff. Nice kid, though, just lazy. Well, I got to go over and talk to Mrs. Carleton's husband. I want to get that over with. If there's anything you can do for me, Troy, I'll let you know."

"Thanks," Jeff said.

Jeff and I walked back to the cottage that was teaching us never again to rent a cottage for the summer. Automatically, with our minds still in a thicket on a golf course, we started on our morning chores. I made the bed while Jeff put fresh adhesive tape on the screen door. Jeff tried to talk the hot-water heater into justifying its existence while I spray-gunned the joint. I was about to start my daily campaign against the ants in the ice box when the girl slammed into the house.

"I'm Fran Leslie," she said. "Where's your husband?"

"Jeff!" I yelled.

I had seen Fran Leslie around the club. She was a pretty girl, in a rather wild, excited way, who seemed continually to be in motion. I finally realized the reason for it. Fran considered herself too sophisticated for the younger set, but she found the older set a bit stuffy. So she spent most of her time shuttling between sets. This, however, seemed to be good for her figure. It was, in fact, developed far beyond her mind.

Impatiently, she said, "This is terribly important!"

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I shouted for Jeff again. He came into the room, saw Fran Leslie inside our cottage, then looked at the screen door as if he were reproaching himself for having put adhesive tape in the wrong places.

"Hello," he said.

"Mr. Troy!" Fran said. "How much do you charge?"

"Different prices," Jeff said. "Three dollars for fixing a flat, five for taking down an old Christmas tree, six —"

"I mean for your services as a detective!"

"Is it you who needs a detective?" Jeff asked.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I'm going to be arrested for killing Janet Carleton, that's why! You've got to save me, Mr. Troy. I didn't kill Janet — or that caddy, either; but everyone on Long Island has thought for years that some day I would. Kill Janet, I mean."

"Sit down, Miss Leslie," Jeff suggested.

"Please, Mr. Troy!" Fran turned to me in exasperation. "I'm practically on my way to the electric chair, and the man asks me to sit down!"

"All right," Jeff said. "What's your motive?"

"Oh, I've got one — and a jury would just eat it up! I wouldn't stand a chance. Janet stole the man I love. I've been insanely jealous for ages."

"A fairly good motive," Jeff said unenthusiastically. "The man you love is Mr. Carleton?"

"Yes. Tom Carleton. Tom's always been my man, if you know what I mean. Then, four years ago, Janet came along. Glamorous, exciting, beautiful Janet! You can see how much I hate her! She took Tom. He never looked at me again."

"Fran," Jeff said, "how old are you?"

"Seventeen. Why?"

"Then Janet took Tom Carleton away from you when you were thirteen."

"Yes! That's how ruthless she was! She knew Tom and I couldn't get married right away and —"

"I suppose," Jeff said, "that your parents insisted you finish grammer school first."

"I knew that I would mature quickly," Fran said. She threw back her shoulders to prove it, and she did prove it. Jeff modestly lowered his eyes. "Tom is only twelve years older than I am," she said, "and we have so much in common."

"What?"

"Well, for one thing . . ."

"Go on," Jeff said.

"Well, for one thing, we both belong to the Country Club."

"Oh," Jeff said. "Frannie, could you see it in Tom's eyes that some day he would marry you?"

"He would have married me, he would have!" Fran cried. "And I've wanted to kill Janet for years! Everybody knows that! Mr. Troy, you've got to save me by finding the real murderer. I'll give you five hundred dollars!"

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"Frannie, why don't you go to a movie or something?"

"If you won't take this case, you know what I'll do? I'll —"

"Stop," Jeff said. "Don't even tell me what you'll do. I'll take the case. I'll try to prove, Frannie, that you didn't commit two murders."

"Oh, thank you so much!"

"Goodbye, Frannie," Jeff said.

She pouted. "Aren't you going to ask me about my alibi?"

"All right. Where were you at the time of the crime?"

"I was walking on the beach, alone."

"Did anybody see you?"

"Not a soul!" Frannie said happily. "I absolutely cannot prove that it wasn't me who committed those murders! I have no alibi!"

"Goodbye, Frannie," Jeff said sternly.

A little later I asked Jeff if he really meant to take Fran's five hundred dollars. He thought that he might as well. She would probably just spend it on bubble gum. I told him I thought that he was underestimating a woman of seventeen. At seventeen a woman has all her faculties; that is, she's a woman. He said he agreed with me but, he said, let's not discuss this any further, let's go and see Mrs. Carleton's husband, Tom.

We found Tom Carleton sitting on the steps of the side porch of his big, year-round house. The fears we had that he might rather see us at some later time he quickly dispelled. He needed someone to talk with, someone, preferably, who was not a friend of the family paying a duty call. We filled his need admirably, he insisted.

He said, "Joe Hinkle told me about you. He's glad you're around. Shall we sit here on the steps? Or would you rather —"

"This is fine," Jeff said.

We sat down with Carleton. He was lean and tall and very attractive in a strong, rugged way. The wrinkles of good humor and laughter stood out now in his pale, somber face like tiny, drained stream beds. He was in complete control of himself. It would be he who would console his wife's friends, not they him.

"I might have prevented it," he said.

Jeff said, "Almost anybody can always figure out that they —"

"No," Tom said, "this is real. You see, I haven't played much golf this year — in the past month none at all. I just went sour on it. Yesterday Janet tried to talk me into playing a round with her before dinner. We used to do that all the time. But I said no, and I wouldn't let her talk me into it. To tell the truth, she got pretty sore about it, in her funny way. Humorous way, I mean. She made some remarks about me and my fishing and fish in general that were classics. Lately, you see, I'd rather fish than golf. So Janet went to the club alone. When she didn't come back for dinner I didn't think anything of it. She often stayed at the club, especially when she was a

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little sore at me. I went to bed about nine. To get to Montauk Point for fishing by five, I have to be on my way at four. So I slept in my study — as I always do when I'm getting up early and don't want to waken Janet when I roll out of bed. That's how I got out of the house this morning without knowing she wasn't at home. I'd left my car in front of the house; I took for granted that Janet's was in the garage. But what I started to say was . . . if I'd played golf with her as she wanted me to . . . but I see your point, Troy. It's no good — that kind of figuring."

"I don't suppose," Jeff said, "you've had any time to think about who might have killed your wife."

"Yes, I have. It doesn't take very many minutes to do a lot of thinking about a thing like that. Nobody could have wanted to kill Janet, no one had any reason to. Nobody had anything to gain in the way of money or anything. And as far as anyone hating her — well, Janet lived an ordinary, suburban life. You don't make enemies living like that. She ran the house, she played golf in the summer, bridge in the winter — she never did anything that would have made an enemy for her."

"What about Fran Leslie?"

Tom Carleton looked at Jeff and smiled wanly. "I think," he said, "that's a foolish question."

"So do I, but I had to know that you thought so, too."

"Frannie's been an embarrassment to me for years. I realize that you should take adolescents and their emotions seriously. But Frannie . . . there's nothing deep or psychological about her. She's a good, healthy extrovert. I spanked her when she was fourteen and if she hadn't enjoyed it so much, I would have kept on spanking her. No, Troy, nobody wanted to kill my wife."

"I think," Jeff said, "I know what you mean."

"Yes. I mean that someone must have been gunning for Eddie Riorden. And Janet was killed because she saw who murdered Eddie."

"Do you know where Eddie lived?"

"No. But the caddy master at the club would know."

"We'll ask him. And thanks."

Jamestown, Long Island, was as Colonial American as anything you saw on the way to Boston. There was a white church, a cannon in the square, a Town Hall beside the Super-Market. The Riorden house was on the edge of the town — a two-story frame building, a yard without a lawn in front of it, a collection of shabby sheds and coops behind it. Eddie's sister answered Jeff's knock. She was a little younger than Eddie, a beautiful girl with shining black hair, dark eyes, an appealing mouth. There was no doubt she was Eddie's sister.

Jeff said, "We'd like to talk to you about Eddie. For just a moment."

"Are you from the police?" She looked at me. "Or a newspaper . . . or what?"

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"We're working with the police," Jeff said.

"I suppose you want to know who Eddie ran around with . . . things like that?"

"Yes."

"I'll have to tell you what I told the rest of them. We don't know. We hardly knew Eddie any more. He wasn't ever home, except to sleep. He just . . . well, drifted away from us lately. We didn't see him much, he never brought any of his friends home."

"Who were his friends?"

She shook her head. "I don't even know if there was anyone special. I . . . I don't like to say this, but it's true. Except for the country club in the summer, Eddie spent more time in Andrew's Bar than he did at home. I wish I could help you, but . . ."

"You have helped us," Jeff said.

Andrew's Bar took up half the ground floor of a tourist hotel that apparently had never lived up to its original owner's hopes. There were only three cars in the parking space meant for twenty or thirty. The bar was not filled with vacationists sopping up before-lunch cocktails; four male natives were spending dimes on beers.

When the bartender placed our beers before us, Jeff said, "My name's Troy, I . . ."

"Troy," the bartender said. He glanced down at his group of four customers. They all looked at Jeff. "Troy," the bartender said again. "I've heard about you. You're helping Joe Hinkle with the murders."

"Yes," Jeff said. "News travels fast around here."

"Yes, it does. A little place, Jamestown, but a nice place."

The tallest of the four beer drinkers said, "We've just been talking about it, the murder."

"I guess you all knew Eddie," Jeff said.

"He was in here every night," the shortest drinker said.

"He missed once a week," the third one said. "The night of the midget auto races."

"He came in then. Late, though," Shorty said.

The third one nodded. "After I went home, I guess."

"Well, more or less you could just about say," the bartender said, "that Eddie was in here every night." He turned to Jeff. "What's that got to do with the murder?"

"You've just been talking about the murder," Jeff said.

"Naturally," the bartender said.

"Eddie was a popular boy, wasn't he?"

"He was a sweet kid," Shorty said.

"A sweet kid," the third man said. "A great ball player, any kind of ball. He was going to go places if he ever got a break. He had everything to live for."

"Everybody liked Eddie, I guess," Jeff said.

A moment died away. Then, carefully, the bartender said, "Yeah, everybody liked Eddie. I can't think

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of a single exception to that rule."

For the first time the fourth man spoke up, and he spoke up angrily. "The hell with it!" he said. "I can think of somebody who didn't like Eddie!"

"Now, wait, Mel," the bartender said. "Take it easy."

"The hell with it!" Mel said. "Listen here, Troy. George Carey didn't like Eddie and everybody here knows it!"

"George Carey," Jeff said. "You mean the golf pro at the Country Club?"

"That's right. I've no idea what it was between Carey and Eddie, but —"

"Mel," the bartender said, "I'm not sure it's up to you to —"

"Eddie's dead, murdered! Listen, Troy, for the past month or so Carey used to come in here. To see Eddie. They'd go back there to the corner table and talk. No, not talk, argue! We never could hear what it was all about and Eddie would never tell us, but it wasn't good. They got pretty hot, the two of them, Eddie and Carey. Well, the other night was the blow-up. For a minute it looked like they were going to start swinging at each other. When Carey went out of here he looked just about mad enough to —"

"Now, take it easy, Mel," the bartender said.

"Mad enough," Jeff said, "to kill Eddie?"

"Yes, blast it! That's what I was going to say and I am saying it! Mad enough to kill Eddie! And Eddie was killed."

We had seen George Carey around the club, of course, but we had never said more than hello to each other. He was a genial, nice-looking fellow in his forties. When Jeff and I walked into his little office in the caddy house, he knew at once why we were calling on him. He wasn't the sort of person you had to handle with care, and Jeff went straight to the point.

"We've just come from Andrew's Bar," Jeff said. "We heard that you and Eddie Riorden nearly slugged it out a couple of nights ago. We didn't hear what it was you disagreed about. Or maybe that isn't important."

Carey thought that over for a moment. "It is important," he said, "because I'm sure you're not going to find anyone else, anyone at all, who ever tangled with Eddie in the slightest degree."

"Everybody loved Eddie," Jeff said. "He hadn't an enemy in the world."

"That's true. Literally."

"But the other night you were ready to take him apart. That could mean that Eddie had one enemy in the world."

"Yes," Carey said. "That's why it's important you understand why I was fighting with Eddie."

He opened a drawer of his desk; he found what he was looking for. He slid the letter out of its envelope and handed it to Jeff. Jeff held it so that I could see.

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It was a short note, written without the aid of a secretary, on the stationery of Randall College, Randall, Ohio. It said: "Dear George; I've got everything set for your boy, Eddie Riorden. He'd better be as good as you say he is. In haste, Carl."

"That's Carl Moss," Carey said. "He coaches football at Randall."

"He got Eddie an athletic scholarship," Jeff said.

"Yes."

"But Eddie didn't want to go to college," Jeff said. "No matter how much you tried to persuade him, he wouldn't agree to go."

"That's it," Carey said. "I've known Eddie since he was caddying up here in his bare feet. He was quite a kid. He was the best high-school athlete I've ever seen. For the last three years I've been after him to go to college. But he was tired of school, he said. Actually, he was lazy. I'm afraid Eddie was well on his way to being a bum. I decided finally to go ahead and get him a scholarship at my old school . . . I thought maybe that would turn the trick. But it didn't. Eddie'd been slopping around for so long that his ambition was all gone. He used to avoid me here at the club. The only place I could corner him was at that bar. I talked myself hoarse to him, and the other night I lost my temper. It made me sore to see a boy like Eddie turning into a bum."

"But you still liked him," Jeff said.

"How could I help it? How could anybody not like Eddie?"

"Well," Jeff said, "I guess that's that."

"Even if it isn't," Carey said, "I'll have to leave you now. Joe Hinkle seems to be holding a little meeting that I'm invited to."

"We'll go with you," Jeff said.

Hinkle was holding his meeting in the same room where we had seen him that morning. The meeting was a small, intimate affair. Carey, Jeff and I joined Hinkle, Fran Leslie, Tom Carleton, and the club's woman champ, Arlene Miller. The meeting didn't look as though it had started; Joe Hinkle didn't look as though he wanted to start it. He was a morose, discouraged man.

"Troy," he said, "tell me something."

"Sure," Jeff said.

"Tell me who killed them. So we can all go home."

"I know how you feel," Jeff said. "Did you find anything more in the thicket?"

"We found a lot. The two halves of a broken niblick, some empty bottles — mostly half-pints — a couple old tin cans, a dozen or so tees, a watch that Mac Small lost seven years ago, a fifty-cent piece, and nine golf balls."

"Did you find Mrs. Carleton's ball?"

"Not yet. We had to knock off because it was getting dark in the thicket. But, frankly, I think we found everything there is in it."

"But of course," Jeff said, "you'll look some more tomorrow."

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"Of course. I'm nothing else, but I'm thorough."

"Mr. Carleton," Jeff said, "is there any chance that Mrs. Carleton wouldn't have been playing with one of her own balls?"

Arlene Miller gave a short laugh. She said, "Janet Carleton would no more think of using any ball but those special ones of hers than she would think of using someone else's clubs. Janet was a real golfer, not a Sunday player."

"I see," Jeff said. He turned back to Hinkle. "Have you found anyone who saw Mrs. Carleton playing her first nine holes?"

"Her last nine holes," Arlene Miller said.

Hinkle cleared his throat. "I been all through that, Troy. Mr. Carleton says that considering the time his wife left home, she would have been lucky to get much more than nine holes played before dark. It seems like she was the last one to start around. Nobody seen her park her car or tee off."

"That isn't unusual," Carey said. "At that time of day everybody at the club is either in the dining room or the bar. There's as much drinking as golf around this place, you all know that."

"Anyway," Hinkle said, "nobody saw her. She must have walked straight from her car to the first tee, or whatever you call it. Eddie must have met her there. He always caddied for her. He was probably waiting for her."

"Somebody," Jeff said, "the last person who left the club last night must have noticed Mrs. Carleton's car was still here. Why didn't they worry about her?"

"That was Al Frost," Hinkle said. "He admits seeing the car. He also admits that after an evening at the bar here he never worries or wonders about anything. Nice fellow though, Al."

"Well," Jeff said, "I won't hold up your meeting any longer."

"I wish you'd stay, Troy."

"No, I couldn't add anything to the proceedings. Call me tomorrow, will you, if you find Mrs. Carleton's ball?"

"Why don't you come and help us?"

"I will," Jeff said.

It was beginning to grow dark when Jeff and I left our cottage that night. It was very dark when we walked through the empty parking lot of the locked-up, deserted clubhouse. I followed Jeff through the gap in the hedge, then I stopped.

"Darling," I said, "I won't go another step until you tell me where we're going and why."

"Haila, if I told you, you wouldn't go with me. Come on now, quietly."

I went on, quietly. We walked across the start of the fairway of the first hole. We went another fifty yards and we were crossing the ninth hole's fairway. Then, in another minute or two, we were groping our way into the thicket. I could touch Jeff,

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but I couldn't see him. I held onto his jacket and shuffled blindly forward. Jeff stopped and sat down; he pulled me down beside him. He put his arm around me. But he didn't kiss me. I still didn't know what we were doing in this hell-black hole.

"May I smoke?" I whispered.

"No. From now on don't even breathe unless it's absolutely necessary."

We sat there for so long that I began to be convinced that I had slept through a day and was now sitting through my second night. I was uncomfortable, cold. I was something else. I found Jeff's ear and whispered into it.

"I'm scared," I said.

"Naturally," Jeff whispered back.

That reassurance did me a lot of good. I wasn't cold any longer, or uncomfortable — I was just frightened. Jeff's hand touched my wrist and tightened on it. I stopped breathing. I had heard it, too.

Through the thicket something was moving toward us. It might have been slithering along on its stomach, it might have been edging along on two feet, or more — but it was coming toward us. Now a piece of foliage brushed my face as it moved back in place. The shuffling sound came closer, and then stopped.

I felt Jeff move. I heard the click of his flashlight and saw a beam of light shoot through the blackness. For a moment it searched wildly, then it hit and held. I saw a man's outstretched arm, his hand six inches above the ground. Clutched in the hand was a golf ball.

Jeff pulled the light up the man's arm until it flashed full in his face. Tom Carleton straightened up. I saw his arm back out of the ray of light, then swing forward through it. . . .

When people regain consciousness, they usually start life again by asking a silly question. My question didn't seem silly to me at the time, but that's exactly what it turned out to be. I looked at Jeff and Joe Hinkle for a moment before I spoke.

I said, "How could Tom Carleton find his wife's golf ball in the dark like that?"

"He didn't find it," Jeff said. "He was losing it."

"Oh," I said. "Where am I?"

"In our cottage," Jeff said.

"Where is Tom Carleton?"

"In my jail," Joe Hinkle said. "Are you all right, Mrs. Troy? He hit you with a golf ball, you know."

"Yes, I know, Mr. Hinkle. But I'm fine. That's just what I needed."

"Well, then, Troy —"

"Sure, Joe, listen. You and your boys couldn't find that ball — because there was no ball. There was no ball because Mrs. Carleton wasn't playing golf. Eddie Riorden was not her caddy — he was her lover."

"Eddie and Mrs. Carleton . . ."

"That thicket was their rendezvous. If anyone had wandered into it unexpectedly, Eddie would have gone through the motions of caddy-

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ing for a lady with a bad slice. It was a nice set-up while it lasted. And it lasted until Tom Carleton got wise."

"So I was wrong," Joe said, "when I figured that one of them got killed because he saw the other one murdered."

"Everybody liked Mrs. Carleton," Jeff said. "Everybody loved Eddie. Nobody had a reason to kill either of them. But maybe, I thought, somebody had a reason to kill *both* of them. And then, when you couldn't find the ball Janet Carleton should have been playing with . . ."

"Yeah," Joe said. "I guess that proved it to you. And when Tom heard you talking about the ball this afternoon, he figured he'd better get one there in a hurry."

"Oh, now I see," I said. "He didn't find that ball. He was putting it there."

"That's right. I'm sorry he hit you with it, Haila."

"Oh, I don't mind. That's a hazard of the game, getting hit. But I don't think it was very sporting the way he did it."

"What, darling?"

"It's a rule, Jeff! You're supposed to yell 'Fore'!"

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KILL AND TELL

by PETER GODFREY

BANNISTER called from the study, "Who is it, Miss Jones?" After twelve years of working together he still hadn't got around to calling me by my first name.

I knocked on the door and ushered in the three men, repeating their introduction for the benefit of my employer. There was Joubert, the tall C.I.D. Inspector with the William Powell mustache, the fresh-faced and surprisingly young-looking detective, Johnson, and the elderly gentleman with the full-blooming mustache and beard, the fiercely-glowing pipe, and the kindly brown eyes. I used his surname, of course — le Roux — but Joubert called him "Uncle" and Johnson called him "Rolf," and both these appellations suited his personality better than the more formal title.

I used to think Bannister was a handsome man when I first went to work for him, but twelve years is a long time for some people. That day, sitting in the brown dressing-gown in which he always worked, with his bald patch thrown into relief by the black fringes of hair and the heavy horn-rimmed spectacles, he looked like nothing so much as a benign beetle.

Knowing him so well, I realized he was bursting with curiosity as to the purpose of the visit, and I also knew, when he asked if I might remain, that his motives were more concerned with the notes I might make for future material rather than any courtesy towards me.

The police had no objection to my presence, and as soon as we were all comfortably settled Joubert opened the conversation. "You are not entirely a stranger to me, Mr. Bannister," he said. "Although this is the first time I have met you in the flesh, I have, of course, read your books. In fact, the two autographed novels you were kind enough to send to my department when you arrived in Cape Town ultimately found their way to my bookshelf."

Bannister visibly preened himself. "Surely this visit," he said, "is not merely to congratulate me on the quality of the thrillers I have written?" He gave a deprecatory grin, as though he hoped this was, in fact, their motive.

"Not quite," said Joubert, and smiled slightly. "Certain things in which my department is vitally interested have occurred recently. If you would be prepared to answer some questions, you might help us enormously."

"Fire away," said Bannister, and settled himself down into what he no

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doubt fancied was the typical attitude of the expert criminologist.

Joubert hesitated before continuing.

"The *Province Times* yesterday," he said, "carried the story of an interview with you in which you discussed the plot of a novel you have just completed. As I understand it, the book deals with a murder committed by a man who has an unassailable alibi. Is that correct?"

"Fundamentally, yes."

"And I gather from the newspaper report that other than the alibi there were clear clues pointing in his direction?"

"Yes. In the book the murderer's wallet with his personal papers is found next to the body, but he is able to prove he was miles away when the fatal shot was fired."

Joubert stole a peculiar sideways look at Rolf and Johnson.

"Knowing your style, Mr. Bannister," he said, "I presume you propounded in the book a perfectly logical and satisfactory solution?"

"Naturally, Inspector. I have a reputation to maintain, you know, and if I dared make use of any far-fetched explanation the critics would pounce on me like a flock of vultures."

"I see," said Joubert, and then went on: "I take it then that the concoction of an alibi such as you describe in the book would be perfectly feasible in real life?"

Bannister was obviously enjoying himself. "Definitely," he said. "And I will go even further, Inspector. In real life no amount of police work would ever be able to smash that alibi. In the book I was forced to adopt a literary subterfuge to make my murderer confess. In real life he would have gone scot-free."

The Inspector was particularly suave when he continued: "And when did you actually finish work on your book, Mr. Bannister?"

My employer turned to me. "You completed the final chapter of *Murder Elsewhere* on Thursday, didn't you, Miss Jones?"

I said, "Yes, Mr. Bannister. I remember stapling and wrapping and sending off the manuscript on Friday. The registration receipt is on the file, if you want to check, but I am perfectly sure."

There was a subtle change in the atmosphere. Johnson grinned — a grin not of amusement but of satisfaction. Rolf took his pipe out of his mouth and ran stubby fingers over his beard in an attitude of expectancy. Joubert sat up straight; there was a new glint in his eye, and his speech had acquired an authoritative undertone.

"Mr. Bannister," he said, "I must warn you at this stage that our visit here is directly concerned with the investigation of a very serious crime. Certain statements you have already made seem to indicate that you are personally involved. I intend to proceed with this questioning, but I am prepared to wait, if you prefer it, until your solicitor arrives."

As an individual, of course, I was one of a group, but functionally, as a

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secretary, I was somehow outside it. My eyes followed the features of the others like the lens of a moving-picture camera.

I must say Bannister took it well. His only apparent reaction to the shock of the *volte face* on the part of the police was a raising of the eyebrows. He even smiled slightly.

"This is very unexpected, Inspector," he said. "It's a novel experience for me to be a suspect. But a solicitor? No, thank you, Inspector — an innocent man shouldn't need a solicitor, and my conscience feels particularly clear this morning." He paused, and added, "What is this serious crime in which you think I am implicated?"

Joubert said, "Murder."

It was an illusion, of course, but the word seemed to echo through the short silence that followed.

Bannister's attitude was paradoxical. His smile broadened, but there was a sober quality in his voice. "Go on," he said.

"You have admitted," said Joubert, "that when you arrived in Cape Town you sent copies of two old books written by yourself to the C.I.D.?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember the titles?"

"Yes. *Death After Hours* and *Tall Man's Murder*."

Rolf asked the next question. "Tell me, Mr. Bannister," he said, "why did you send these books to the C.I.D.?"

"A custom of mine, Mr. le Roux. I travel a lot, as you know, and whenever I reach a centre in which I intend to stay for a while, I send copies of these same two books to the police. A sort of tribute," he added with a grin, "to the people who supply me with the raw material of my craft."

"But why those two books particularly?" Rolf persisted.

"If you examine them," said Bannister, "you will notice a newspaper clipping pasted on the flyleaf of each. That is the explanation — both books were based on actual cases — unsolved cases — and I assumed they would therefore be of some interest to the members of the C.I.D."

Joubert again took over the questioning. "We noticed the clippings, of course, and there are certain curious features about both."

"Such as?" There was mockery in Bannister's tone, and that was when I first realized he disliked the Inspector.

Joubert was unruffled. "This first one, now," he said. "It was pasted in the flyleaf of *Death After Hours*, and is the report of an inquest on William Cullingworth, who died from the effects of potassium cyanide poisoning at Ipswich almost fifteen years ago. The strange feature of the case is that Cullingworth was discovered in a locked room; there was no trace of poison except in the deceased; nor was the container of that poison ever found. On the other hand, there was no evidence of foul play. The last person to see him was yourself, but you

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had left him at least an hour before death occurred, as estimated by the medical examiner. Since potassium cyanide is an almost instantaneous poison and you were with a group of people from the moment you left Cullingworth, your alibi was unassailable."

"Go on, Inspector."

"I *am* going on. Exactly six months after Cullingworth's death the book based on the case was first published. Rather quick work that, wasn't it?"

Bannister smiled again. "I am a fast writer, Inspector," he said.

"Yes? Well, that may be. At any rate, the story revealed an ingenious method of administering poison by means of a delayed-action capsule. The murdered man in the book you called Battista, but he was obviously Cullingworth. Just as obviously the murderer, whom you called Crafford, was yourself."

Bannister said, "Quite right, Inspector," and then laughed out loud. "Don't tell me the serious crime you are investigating is poor old Cullingworth's death? Isn't Ipswich a bit outside your jurisdiction?"

Joubert's expression did not change, but a slow flush showed his hackles were rising. Before he could speak again, Rolf's voice came, deep-toned and soothing.

"No, Mr. Bannister," he said, "but what happened at Ipswich may be relevant to the case we are working on now. What interests me is why, in the story, you made yourself the murderer?"

The tension in Bannister's manner when he spoke to Joubert was quite absent in his conversation with Rolf. "There's nothing mysterious about it, Mr. le Roux," he said. "It arises naturally from the type of detective story I write. The general formula for my books is the commission of a crime which cannot be solved by ordinary police routine — only by the irregular methods of Triton Drake, my detective character. My plots are worked out by thinking out almost perfect crimes. Can you wonder, then, that I identify myself with the murderers in my books? In the case of Cullingworth there was an even more perfect identification. I had spoken to the man only a short while before his mysterious death. I asked myself a question: assuming I had killed Cullingworth, how did I do it? The answer was *Death After Hours*. Of course," he added with a side-glance at Joubert, "as good a case could be made out to establish my identity with Triton Drake."

"I take it then," said Rolf, "that you also identified yourself with the criminal in *Tall Man's Murder*?"

"Yes," answered Bannister, and proceeded to elaborate. "I knew the victim of the actual crime — in fact, we were in the same picnic party the day he met his death. The murderer was never discovered, although the weapon was found — an ugly piece of fencing post about eighteen inches long.

"What gave me the idea for the book was the medical evidence at the

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inquest. The doctor was positive, on account of the angle of the blow, that the murderer was well over six feet tall. As you can see, I am a good three inches shorter than that, and again I asked myself the question: Assuming you are the murderer, how would it be possible for you to fake the angle of the blow to provide yourself with an alibi? After a few minutes' thought I found the answer — a ridiculously simple one. So I wrote the book."

Joubert again joined in the conversation. "And what was this ridiculously simple answer?" he asked.

"Well, Inspector, it struck me that the doctor's deduction was illogical. What he should have said was the murderer's height from the ground was well over six feet *at the time the blow was struck*. A wound of the identical angle could have been inflicted by a smaller man standing on something. Since the scene of the crime was flat terrain with no stones or logs handy, I conceived the idea of a careful murderer, after premeditation, jumping into the air to deliver the blow. Such a stroke would be quite unnatural in a crime of passion, but an ideal way of creating an alibi for a small man in a carefully thought-out murder. Incidentally, the method is perfectly practical — it's simply a matter of correct timing."

"You sound as though you had experimented," said Joubert with a mirthless grin.

"Oh, but I did," said Bannister, and the irony in his voice matched Joubert's tone. "Of course, you may be surprised to hear I did not use a human subject — just a soft hat on a pedestal."

"But you wrote your book," said Joubert, "only when you were convinced the method was practical?"

"Yes."

"So practical that it might very well have been the method adopted by the actual murderer?"

Bannister stared at him. "It might have been," he said.

Joubert thumbed through the pages of a notebook. "I see here," he said, "that the actual crime was committed only four months before this book was published. That was even quicker work than last time, wasn't it?"

My employer did not lose his temper immediately. "It was an easier plot to handle," he said quietly, and then suddenly flared up. "What nonsense is this, anyway?" he asked. "Admittedly I have agreed to answer your questions, but I doubt very much if you have any right to interrogate me without informing me first about what crime you are actually investigating. And what relevancy can the speed of my writing have?"

"It has some importance," said Joubert, and turned abruptly to me. "How long have you been employed by Mr. Bannister, Miss Jones?"

I told him.

"That's a pity," he went on. "That means you came to work for him only after the publication of *Tall Man's Murder*."

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Bannister's voice came, cold with rage. "This is going too far," he said. "My agreement to answer questions didn't include a cross-examination of my secretary. Beyond typing my manuscripts and taking down dictation from me, she can have no possible knowledge whatsoever."

I felt the blood leave my face. I have said before that I had the sensation of being apart from the group; at that moment I realized the feeling was an illusion. Before I could stop myself, anger and hatred had leaped into my voice.

"That is not the truth, Mr. Bannister," I said, "although you probably don't know it. You don't work for a person as long as I've worked for you without learning plenty about him — sometimes more than he knows about himself."

In my employer's expression was reflected the sudden revelation that I was more than a stenographic robot. Immediately I regretted losing my temper.

"I'm sorry," I said, more quietly, and then addressed him directly. "You see, Mr. Bannister, it's quite obvious to both of us that the police are making some kind of mistake. If so, there can be no harm done if I answer their questions. In fact, it may help in rectifying the error more quickly."

There was still that faint hint of amazement in his eyes, but it was obvious that he was pacified.

Joubert went on: "Isn't four months, Miss Jones, a remarkably short time between starting a book and final publication?"

"It is fast," I said, "but not unduly so. Once Mr. Bannister has the idea worked out in his mind he dictates very rapidly. I should say it takes roughly a month to complete a manuscript, and after that it is not abnormal for publication to occur within three months. To my knowledge there have been two other books of Mr. Bannister's that have been written and published within four months, although the average time is five or six months. It all depends on the printers."

"Or on how quickly the idea is worked out, I suppose. Are all Mr. Bannister's plots based on real-life incidents?"

My employer was urbanity itself again. "Shouldn't that question rather be put to me, Inspector?" he asked. "After all, surely I am the best authority on what goes on in my own mind?"

Joubert nodded. "Well?" he asked.

I once saw Bannister give a lecture on the detective story to the Birmingham Pen Club. He adopted the same attitude now. More — even his first words sounded faintly familiar.

"There is no such thing as a really original detective plot," he said. "There are only six basic ideas, and all detective plots are variations on them. So is all crime in real life. But since the essence of the good detective story is credibility, it is only natural to expect that the competent writer will base his novel either on

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what has happened or what could happen in real life. In fact, it is quite common for authors to use actual unsolved mysteries as basic plots, as I did in *Death After Hours* and *Tall Man's Murder* — I can name several other authors who have done so.

"However, those are the only two books of mine which have a real-life counterpart. Normally, I utilize the second method — I imagine a crime with as many credible but out of the ordinary features as possible, and then devise a logical solution to fit the circumstances."

It was Rolf who asked the next question, punctuating it with smoke-puffs from his pipe. "And the characters?" he queried. "Are they also all created in your own mind?"

Bannister laughed. "There you have me," he said. "As a matter of fact, all the characters in my books are based on actual people, although sometimes two or more living people go to make one fiction character. What is amazing is how few of the more repulsive personalities recognize themselves in the stories. I suppose everyone has a higher opinion of himself than the next man, and therefore cannot recognize an objective description of himself."

Joubert again broke in. "The characters in this latest book of yours, *Murder Elsewhere*, are also based on living people?"

"Yes."

"We have already gone over the plot, and from what we have spoken about before, it seems the murderer in the book is again modeled upon yourself?"

"And the detective," said Bannister with a grin.

"And the detective," repeated Joubert. "Who were the other characters in real life? The man who was murdered, for instance?"

Bannister was looking at him coldly again. "I don't see the significance of this," he said, "but if you must know, the character was based on Blair Clayton, who is a wholesale merchant here in Cape Town."

"I know Clayton," said Joubert. "Oh, yes, didn't you have some sort of a scene with him in the Delmonico about six weeks ago?"

Bannister hesitated perceptibly before answering. "As a matter of fact, there was some trouble," he said. "Clayton had had a few drops too many; there was an argument and he struck me. I couldn't hit a drunken man and I had no desire to make an exhibition of myself in such a public place, so I simply walked out."

Joubert's voice dropped its deceptive casualness and came out steely-sharp. "Is it not a fact that the quarrel you had with Clayton concerned a woman?"

My employer's face had gone quite pale and his voice trembled with anger. "Once again, Inspector, you are abusing your position. I have agreed to answer any question relevant to this mysterious case you are investigating. I have not agreed, nor will I ever agree, to answer irrelevant questions of a purely personal nature."

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"Your quarrel with Clayton," said Joubert, "is extremely relevant to the case I am investigating. I must tell you, too, that I have other evidence."

Bannister looked at him queerly. "If the others have told you," he said, "then the damage has been done. I don't suppose there is any further harm in confirming what you have said. However, I would appreciate it if the name of the lady could be kept out of any further publicity.

"Clayton, as you probably know, is the world's worst philanderer. I used to be fairly friendly with him, and I saw these things for myself. Anything in a skirt attracted him, and most women responded, though for the life of me I don't know what they saw in him. It was when I saw him at his usual game, with a lady of whom I am very fond, that I tried to warn him off at the Delmonico."

There was a peculiar expression of relief on Joubert's face. He nodded to Johnson, who handed him an envelope. Out of it he took a familiar gold tie-pin.

"This has your initials on it," he said to Bannister. "I don't suppose you will deny it's yours?"

Bannister seemed more pleased than otherwise to see it. "Certainly not," he said. "I've been looking for it everywhere. Where did you find it?"

"It was found at three o'clock this morning," said Joubert, "beside the murdered body of Blair Clayton."

I have never seen my employer so taken aback, but it was only for a moment, then a glint of amusement appeared in his eyes. "Many things are clearer to me now," he said, and added, "I take it, then, Inspector, that Clayton was killed some time during last night?"

"As near as we can make it," said Joubert, "he was murdered between 10 P.M. and 1 A.M."

Bannister laughed out loud. "Then I am afraid you will have to look elsewhere for the guilty party," he said. "I can account for every moment of my time between those hours."

Joubert said, "So could the murderer in *Murder Elsewhere*."

Bannister lost his temper. "To blazes with you and your innuendos!" he said. "If you feel I am the guilty man, arrest me and charge me. It's quite plain you've simply come here on a fishing expedition, and that you haven't got a scrap of evidence to stand up in court. I challenge you now — either arrest me or get out!"

The slow flush had again risen on Joubert's neck. "And I will answer your challenge," he said, "but first I want to tell you something. Real life is somewhat different from a detective story. You've been too clever even for yourself this time, Bannister.

"It is perfectly true that I have no direct evidence that you murdered Clayton, but you have failed to take into consideration the value of circumstantial evidence. You see, Bannister, when there are sufficient circumstances forming a pattern — a pattern of guilt — any jury in the world must convict."

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Bannister made a gesture of protest, but Joubert continued. "No, don't interrupt me. Let me tell you what I will show the jury. I will show them first that you hated Clayton, that you came to blows with him recently, that your tie-pin was found next to the body. You will have an alibi, but I will show them your own description of how that alibi was constructed, of how the murder was done, written by you in your book *at least a week before Clayton was killed.*

"And in case there is a feeling that there might be some sort of a coincidence, I will tell them also of the two other violent deaths that have occurred in the past, and how books on these deaths were published a remarkably short time after these murders had occurred. When I have finished, I promise you the jury will ask themselves: were those other books written before or after the crimes?"

Bannister was badly shaken, but he still kept control of his wits. "You will never be allowed to produce that as evidence," he said.

"That is a matter of opinion," said Joubert, "and no doubt the lawyers will fight it out. But to my mind it will be admissible. It is not as though you have already stood trial and been declared innocent on these points. And it is perfectly relevant to the case I am going to present.

"You see, Bannister, the jury will want to know what kind of a man you are, and I am going to tell them. An intelligent man, yes, but with a mental twist causing you to commit almost perfect crimes to baffle the police. The jury will see for themselves, as I have seen, how you gloat over the fact that you kill, tell the world with only indirect concealment how you have killed and then get off scot-free. Only you are not going to get off scot-free this time. You remembered all the facts, but you forgot the total pattern."

He paused on a note of triumph, and I mentally braced myself to hear the formal phraseology of the charge, but it was not his voice that broke the silence.

"There are other patterns, Dirk," said Rolf le Roux.

Joubert turned.

Rolf's eyes were as brown and as soothing as ever, but there was an undertone of determination in his voice. "I will not let you arrest this man, Dirk," he said. "You see, he is innocent."

Joubert was taken aback.

"Can you convince a jury of that?" he asked.

"That I doubt," said Rolf, "but I am sure when I have finished you will never be able to convince them he is guilty."

"Now you are talking nonsense ——" Joubert began, but was interrupted by my employer.

"Let him go on," Bannister said, and there was a peculiar undertone in his voice. "After all, Inspector, you have already given the case for the prosecution."

Joubert had a momentary struggle

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with himself, then, "Well?" he asked Rolf.

The tension in the room crackled while the old man deliberately puffed his pipe into a satisfactory blaze.

"It is like this, Dirk," he said slowy, settling himself down more comfortably in his chair. "You talk of a pattern, but which pattern do you mean? The picture of the lunatic who writes murders and then does them to gloat over his own cleverness, or the picture of an intelligent man cold-bloodedly murdering for an understandable motive?"

"I mean an intelligent man," said Joubert, "who has just one mental kink. I think that is perfectly understandable."

"It is not as understandable as you think," said Rolf, and took a deep puff at his pipe. "Come, Dirk, let us analyze this question a little further. I will agree with you that an intelligent man may have a mental kink, but I contend such a man would not write detective stories."

"I don't see the connection."

"Let me explain. If there is such a kink in a man, what would it consist of? One of its main essentials must be an impulse to kill. You have agreed Bannister is an intelligent man, and in every case that I have heard of, the impulse to kill in an intelligent man is unconscious, an overpowering urge that activates his muscles when conditions are right, without passing under the criticism of his consciousness. That is understandable, is it not? If it ever became conscious in an intelligent man, his very intelligence would reject it.

"Nevertheless, it is a fact that everyone has an instinct to kill, but that instinct is diverted in normal people to other forms of activity. When you hit your little golf ball all over the veld, you are satisfying your unconscious sadism just as much as if you used your club to hit me over the head. Now do you see what I mean? If Bannister had this mental kink, this impulse to kill, it is *used up* in writing his detective stories. Just because he writes logically about murder is sufficient indication that murder with him would be conscious — he would not kill because of the sort of kink you describe."

"Assuming I admit that as possible for the moment," said Joubert, "what about the other side of the question? We have no evidence about the first two cases, of course, but Clayton's death was no crime of sudden impulse. It was cleverly and diabolically planned for an obvious motive."

Rolf smiled. "I am glad you mentioned the other two cases," he said. "As you say, you have no indication on the facts that Bannister's story is not the correct one. In effect, you are admitting what has actually happened — you are allowing your knowledge of the latest murder to color your impressions of the old cases.

"So let us consider this last crime by itself. Again, you yourself have stressed that Bannister is intelligent. Can you see any intelligent man scheming this murder, writing a book

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on it, and then giving the details to a newspaper *before* the actual murder is committed?"

Joubert became excited. "But the facts, man, the facts! Your explanation sounds plausible, but it still doesn't fit the pattern. You must admit Clayton's murder was an exact duplication of the crime described in *Murder Elsewhere*. Only a bare outline of the plot was given to the *Province Times*. Who but Bannister could have made so exact a copy in real life?"

Rolf said, "His secretary."

We were all sitting still, of course, but I felt a sense of swinging movement. Their eyes turning in my direction started it, and my consciousness seemed to sway outside my body. When my voice came it was as though I was listening to another person.

"Are you accusing me of murder, Mr. le Roux? What motive could I possibly have for doing away with Mr. Clayton?"

"Revenge," said the old man, and went on quickly before I could interrupt. "No, let me explain. I began to wonder when you turned on Mr. Bannister during this interview. There was hate in your voice and your expression, and immediately I saw something which did not make sense. I asked myself why an efficient girl works twelve years for a person she hates. The obvious reason is that you did not always hate him, and the intensity of your present feeling made me suspect that your original feeling of liking was just as intense. I say that you stayed with Mr. Bannister for the major portion of the period because you were in love with him."

"This is ridiculous," I heard myself saying, "but go on. Carry your argument to its logical conclusion. If I were in love with Mr. Bannister, why did I continue to work for him when I started to hate him?"

Despite the words the brown eyes were kindly. "Here I can only guess," he said. "I do not think the transition was rapid — I think it took many years. Nor do I think you really hated Bannister until you were deceived by another man, and suddenly realized the years you had wasted."

My voice said, "Your imagination is getting more powerful every second. Who was this mythical man with whom I am supposed to have fallen in love?"

"Blair Clayton — and this is not entirely guesswork, Miss Jones. Clayton visited here often; he must have spoken with you many times. He had the reputation of making love to every woman he met, and it is common talk he was as attractive as he was faithless. You are not without good looks, Miss Jones — why should you be the one exception in his life?"

I did not answer.

"When Clayton deceived you," he went on, "I think you were filled with bitter loathing of both men who had caused you so much frustration. And then, when Bannister grew to hate Clayton, and dictated to you daily more and more details of a perfect plot for his murder, you saw your

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opportunity to revenge yourself on both the men you hated."

Joubert interrupted uneasily, "This is not evidence, Uncle. Your reasoning is plausible, but we could never get a conviction on it."

"I agree," said Rolf, "but with that alternative pattern brought forward, you could never get a conviction against Bannister either, and that is what I set out to show you."

"Come now, Mr. le Roux," interrupted Bannister. "While I appreciate the building up of an hypothetical case to get me out of trouble, aren't you being a bit hard on Miss Jones? After all, I know her ——"

He talked, and my consciousness swayed, but back this time. Then my voice was my own voice, coming from my own body, with all the pent-up frustration of years.

"What do you know about me? You — who have always looked on me as another piece of office equipment. That man discovered more about me in an hour than you have seen in the twelve years we have worked together. Oh, yes, everything he said was true — I killed Clayton because I hated him and I hated you.

"Your jaw hangs open now, doesn't it? I hope I've shocked you into seeing me as a woman at last. Yes, and seeing yourself for what you are.

"I was in love with you when I first came here. Everything you did was right. When I made plot suggestions to you, and you rejected them, and then later came forward with the identical ideas as your own brilliant inspirations, I was not annoyed. I saw you had forgotten my part, and I was proud to have helped you even so indirectly. But that changed. Gradually, I came to realize you were a thief — you had stolen my love, you had stolen my brains, you had stolen my youth.

"At the time I met Clayton, these things didn't count for much. Later, when I realized I might have held him if I had met him twelve years before, I saw for the first time just how much they did mean.

"I see you flinched when I mentioned the plot ideas. That's good — it means you're beginning to remember. Think back again and realize just how much I influenced you towards your own doom. The sending of the books of the previous cases to the police, touches in the plot of *Murder Elsewhere* that suited my purpose better, yes — even persuading you to give the interview to the newspaper . . .

"They won't hang you, Bannister — they'll hang me instead. But I don't care. I have very little left to live for, anyway. And I won't entirely lose my revenge.

"You know what my last thought will be on the gallows? I'll be thinking of you conscious of yourself at last as a colossal sham, as a vulture battening on the brains of others, as the person responsible for two deaths. I'll be thinking of you, living with yourself, hating yourself — and I'll die happy, Bannister — do you hear that? — happy!"

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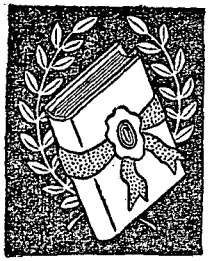
DETECTIVE'S DOZEN

Crème de la crime; or, The Best of All Time



Sooner or later, somewhere along the 'tec trail, every reader, reviewer, and researcher asks the inevitable question: Which are the twelve best detective short stories I have ever read? *The crème de la crime, the Blue Ribbon Panel of all time . . . Now, it stands to reason that no list compiled by a single person, even the most widely read and most acutely critical of us all, could possibly be accepted as definitive: one person's opinion is just that — an expression of personal preferences. But then it occurred to us that if we could put together a consensus of opinion — say, the amalgam of a dozen expert lists, the considered verdict of a Blue Ribbon Jury — then we might just possibly have a list approaching the "best" with some degree of authority. So, exactly one year ago, we began sending out questionnaires to a specially selected symposium of experts, representing, as you will see, every phase and factor of the ferreting field, including some of our fanciest aficionados and even more important, some of our plainest fans.*

The replies to our queries were astonishing — on many counts. Some experts thought the whole idea silly — one described it as "the most frightful cornstarch"; others thought we should reserve the notion for a lonely sojourn on a desert isle — and mentally consigned us to the most isolated desert island they could recall; still others admitted frankly that they did not feel qualified to join the symposium — "acquaintance too limited" — "knowledge and memory too sketchy" — "find myself completely at a loss" — "entirely out of my field"; and still others administered "the most unkindest cut of all" by not even bothering to answer our letters of inquiry.

But the "whole idea" could not have been as stuffy and saccharine as some thought — for out of twenty-four experts approached, eleven joined the panel with enthusiasm, and these eleven (with your Editors serving as the twelfth talesman) constitute as distinguished and impressive a criminological conference as we could possibly have hoped for.

First, then, let us introduce the members of the jury:

Representing craftsmen, critics, and connoisseurs: James Hilton, Howard Haycraft, John Dickson Carr, Anthony Boucher, Vincent Starrett, James Sandoe, August Derleth, and Viola Brothers Shore.

Representing publishers' editors: Lee Wright.

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Representing bookdealers specializing in the detective-mystery story: Lew D. Feldman.

Representing fans at large (and bear in mind that all the other experts also represent fans at large, since it is necessary, before one can become a writer, critic, editor, bookseller, or connoisseur to be first, and last, a reader): Charles Honce.

These twelve-men-and-women-in-a-box, each nominating the dozen best detective short stories, had a collective vote of 144 titles. As it turned out, the twelve jurors voted for 83 different stories — which gives you some idea of the spread of selection. But of these 83 "best stories" a round dozen stood out as top favorites — and so we give you, as the joint judgment of our jeweled jury, "The Twelve Best Detective Short Stories Ever Written":

(*8 votes out of a possible 12*)

The Hands of Mr. Ottermole.....*by* Thomas Burke

(*6 votes out of a possible 12*)

The Purloined Letter.....*by* Edgar A. Poe
The Red-Headed League.....*by* A. Conan Doyle
The Avenging Chance.....*by* Anthony Berkeley

(*5 votes out of a possible 12*)

The Absent-Minded Coterie.....*by* Robert Barr
The Problem of Cell 13.....*by* Jacques Futrelle

(*3 votes out of a possible 12*)

The Oracle of the Dog.....*by* G. K. Chesterton
Naboth's Vineyard.....*by* Melville Davisson Post
The Gioconda Smile.....*by* Aldous Huxley
The Yellow Slugs.....*by* H. C. Bailey
The Genuine Tabard.....*by* E. C. Bentley
Suspicion.....*by* Dorothy L. Sayers

As luck would have it — certain ideas have a way of resolving themselves into ultimate simplicity — the individual choices of the jurors and the final consensus of the "twelve best" dovetailed with the most artistic precision: it is possible for each expert to "sponsor" one of the twelve best stories. And so, beginning in this issue, we bring you THE GOLDEN DOZEN, *and with each "tale of tales" we shall give you the background of the expert and that expert's full list of "the best detective short stories of all time." The detailed lists of all twelve members of the jury offer you a reading guide of unusual and interesting scope in the vast, varied, and vital calendar of vicarious crime . . .*

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ANTHONY BOUCHER SELECTS . . .

Anthony Boucher needs no introduction to readers of EQMM. He is well-known to most devotees of detection as the author of mystery novels under two names, Anthony Boucher and H. H. Holmes; as the creator of Nick Noble in detective short stories; as a radio writer; as an anthology editor; as a translator; as a former reviewer for the "San Francisco Chronicle"; as a frequent contributor to the Sunday Book Review section of the "New York Times"; and last but not least, as the present conductor of the "Speaking of Crime" Department of EQMM. (And even this catalogue of activity fails to do complete justice to Anthony Boucher's remarkable coverage of the mystery field.)

Here is Mr. Boucher's list of the 12-best-shorts — which he warns is a "toughie, and though I've spent much time on it, I'm not altogether sure that a second list of 12-best wouldn't be nearly as good . . . I don't need to analyze the tremendous difficulty which we've both mentioned so often and discussed at such length — how so many books of detective shorts are excellent as a corpus, yet no single story stands out as one of the dozen best-of-all-time . . ."

The Hands of Mr. Ottermole . . . . . *by* Thomas Burke
The Purloined Letter . . . . . *by* Edgar A. Poe
The Speckled Band . . . . . *by* A. Conan Doyle
Naboth's Vineyard . . . . . *by* Melville Davisson Post
A Matter of Taste . . . . . *by* Dorothy L. Sayers
A Passage to Benares . . . . . *by* T. S. Stribling
The Gutting of Couffignal . . . . . *by* Dashiell Hammett
The Rubber Trumpet . . . . . *by* Roy Vickers
Dime a Dance . . . . . *by* Cornell Woolrich
Philomel Cottage . . . . . *by* Agatha Christie
Back for Christmas . . . . . *by* John Collier
The Biter Bit . . . . . *by* Wilkie Collins

It is particularly fitting that Anthony Boucher "sponsor" Thomas Burke's "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole." Along with John Dickson Carr and your Editors, Mr. Boucher has been one of the staunchest and most articulate defenders of "Ottermole's" high place in homicidal fiction. Mr. Carr has said that "Ottermole" is one of four detective short stories which share "the honours for supreme untouchable top-notch excellence." Your Editors have already gone on record as believing that "No finer crime story has ever been written, period." Mr. Boucher has described "The Hands

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of Mr. Ottermole" as "a sheerly terrifying story. It imparts to the reader a quality of horror and shock usually associated with tales of the supernatural or of pure sensation, while staying within the bounds of the strict detective story."

Here, then, is the story voted by eight out of twelve experts as one of the all-time, all-star, all-out "greats" — if not, indeed, the very greatest detective short story ever written.

THE HANDS OF MR. OTTERMOLE

by THOMAS BURKE

AT SIX O'CLOCK of a January evening Mr. Whybrow was walking home through the cobweb alleys of London's East End. He had left the golden clamour of the great High Street to which the tram had brought him from the river and his daily work, and was now in the chessboard of byways that is called Mallon End. None of the rush and gleam of the High Street trickled into these byways. A few paces south — a flood tide of life, foaming and beating. Here — only slow-shuffling figures and muffled pulses. He was in the sink of London, the last refuge of European vagrants.

As though in tune with the street's spirit, he too walked slowly, with head down. It seemed that he was pondering some pressing trouble, but he was not. He had no trouble. He was walking slowly because he had been on his feet all day, and he was bent in abstraction because he was wondering whether the Missis would have herrings for his tea, or haddock; and he was trying to decide which would be the more tasty on a night like this. A wretched night it was, of damp and mist, and the mist wandered into his throat and his eyes, and the damp had settled on pavement and roadway, and where the sparse lamplight fell it sent up a greasy sparkle that chilled one to look at. By contrast it made his speculations more agreeable, and made him ready for that tea — whether herring or haddock. His eye turned from the glum bricks that made his horizon, and went forward half a mile. He saw a gas-lit kitchen, a flamy fire and a spread tea table. There was toast in the hearth and a singing kettle on the side and a piquant effusion of herrings, or maybe of haddock, or perhaps sausages. The vision gave his aching feet a throb of energy. He shook imperceptible damp from his shoulders, and hastened towards its reality.

But Mr. Whybrow wasn't going to get any tea that evening — or any other evening. Mr. Whybrow was going to die. Somewhere within a

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hundred yards of him another man was walking: a man much like Mr. Whybrow and much like any other man, but without the only quality that enables mankind to live peaceably together and not as madmen in a jungle. A man with a dead heart eating into itself and bringing forth the foul organisms that arise from death and corruption. And that thing in man's shape, on a whim or a settled idea — one cannot know — had said within himself that Mr. Whybrow should never taste another herring. Not that Mr. Whybrow had injured him. Not that he had any dislike of Mr. Whybrow. Indeed, he knew nothing of him save as a familiar figure about the streets. But moved by a force that had taken possession of his empty cells, he had picked on Mr. Whybrow with that blind choice that makes us pick one restaurant table that has nothing to mark it from four or five other tables, or one apple from a dish of half a dozen equal apples; or that drives Nature to send a cyclone upon one corner of this planet, and destroy five hundred lives in that corner, and leave another five hundred in the same corner unharmed. So this man had picked on Mr. Whybrow, as he might have picked on you or me, had we been within his daily observation; and even now he was creeping through the blue-toned streets, nursing his large white hands, moving ever closer to Mr. Whybrow's tea table, and so closer to Mr. Whybrow himself.

He wasn't, this man, a bad man. Indeed, he had many of the social and amiable qualities, and passed as a respectable man, as most successful criminals do. But the thought had come into his mouldering mind that he would like to murder somebody, and, as he held no fear of God or man, he was going to do it, and would then go home to *his* tea. I don't say that flippantly, but as a statement of fact. Strange as it may seem to the humane, murderers must and do sit down to meals after a murder. There is no reason why they shouldn't, and many reasons why they should. For one thing, they need to keep their physical and mental vitality at full beat for the business of covering their crime. For another, the strain of their effort makes them hungry, and satisfaction at the accomplishment of a desired thing brings a feeling of relaxation towards human pleasures. It is accepted among non-murderers that the murderer is always overcome by fear for his safety and horror at his act; but this type is rare. His own safety is, of course, his immediate concern, but vanity is a marked quality of most murderers, and that, together with the thrill of conquest, makes him confident that he can secure it, and when he has restored his strength with food he goes about securing it as a young hostess goes about the arranging of her first big dinner — a little anxious, but no more. Criminologists and detectives tell us that *every* murderer, however intelligent or cunning, always makes one slip in his tactics — one little slip that brings

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the affair home to him. But that is only half true. It is true only of the murderers who are caught. Scores of murderers are not caught: therefore scores of murderers do not make any mistake at all. This man didn't.

As for horror or remorse, prison chaplains, doctors and lawyers have told us that of murderers they have interviewed under condemnation and the shadow of death, only one here and there has expressed any contrition for his act, or shown any sign of mental misery. Most of them display only exasperation at having been caught when so many have gone undiscovered, or indignation at being condemned for a perfectly reasonable act. However normal and humane they may have been before the murder, they are utterly without conscience after it. For what is conscience? Simply a polite nickname for superstition, which is a polite nickname for fear. Those who associate remorse with murder are, no doubt, basing their ideas on the world legend of the remorse of Cain, or are projecting their own frail minds into the mind of the murderer, and getting false reactions. Peaceable folk cannot hope to make contact with this mind, for they are not merely different in mental type from the murderer: they are different in their personal chemistry and construction. Some men can and do kill, not one man, but two or three, and go calmly about their daily affairs. Other men could not, under the most agonising provocation, bring themselves even to wound. It is men of this sort who imagine the murderer in torments of remorse and fear of the law, whereas he is actually sitting down to his tea.

The man with the large white hands was as ready for his tea as Mr. Whybrow was, but he had something to do before he went to it. When he had done that something, and made no mistake about it, he would be even more ready for it, and would go to it as comfortably as he went to it the day before, when his hands were stainless.

Walk on, then, Mr. Whybrow, walk on; and as you walk, look your last upon the familiar features of your nightly journey. Follow your jack-o'-lantern tea table. Look well upon its warmth and colour and kindness; feed your eyes with it, and tease your nose with its gentle domestic odours; for you will never sit down to it. Within ten minutes' pacing of you a pursuing phantom has spoken in his heart, and you are doomed. There you go — you and phantom — two nebulous dabs of mortality, moving through green air along pavements of powder blue, the one to kill, the other to be killed. Walk on. Don't annoy your burning feet by hurrying, for the more slowly you walk, the longer you will breathe the green air of this January dusk, and see the dreamy lamplight and the little shops, and hear the agreeable commerce of the London crowd and the haunting pathos of the street organ. These things are dear to you, Mr. Whybrow. You don't know it now, but in fifteen minutes you will

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have two seconds in which to realise how inexpressibly dear they are.

Walk on, then, across this crazy chessboard. You are in Lagos Street now, among the tents of the wanderers of Eastern Europe. A minute or so, and you are in Loyal Lane, among the lodging houses that shelter the useless and the beaten of London's camp followers. The lane holds the smell of them, and its soft darkness seems heavy with the wail of the futile. But you are not sensitive to impalpable things, and you plod through it, unseeing, as you do every evening, and come to Blean Street, and plod through that. From basement to sky rise the tenements of an alien colony. Their windows slot the ebony of their walls with lemon. Behind those windows strange life is moving, dressed with forms that are not of London or of England, yet, in essence, the same agreeable life that you have been living, and to-night will live no more. From high above you comes a voice crooning *The Song of Katta*. Through a window you see a family keeping a religious rite. Through another you see a woman pouring out tea for her husband. You see a man mending a pair of boots; a mother bathing her baby. You have seen all these things before, and never noticed them. You do not notice them now, but if you knew that you were never going to see them again, you would notice them. You never *will* see them again, not because your life has run its natural course, but because a man whom you have often passed in the street has at his own solitary pleasure decided to usurp the awful authority of nature, and destroy you. So perhaps it's as well that you don't notice them, for your part in them is ended. No more for you these pretty moments of our earthly travail: only one moment of terror, and then a plunging darkness.

Closer to you this shadow of massacre moves, and now he is twenty yards behind you. You can hear his footfall, but you do not turn your head. You are familiar with footfalls. You are in London, in the easy security of your daily territory, and footfalls behind you, your instinct tells you, are no more than a message of human company.

But can't you hear something in those footfalls — something that goes with a widdershins beat? Something that says: *Look out, look out. Beware, beware.* Can't you hear the very syllables of *mur-der-er, mur-der-er?* No; there is nothing in footfalls. They are neutral. The foot of villainy falls with the same quiet note as the foot of honesty. But those footfalls, Mr. Whybrow, are bearing on to you a pair of hands, and there *is* something in hands. Behind you that pair of hands is even now stretching its muscles in preparation for your end. Every minute of your days you have been seeing human hands. Have you ever realised the sheer horror of hands — those appendages that are a symbol for our moments of trust and affection and salutation? Have you thought of the sickening potentialities that lie

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within the scope of that five-tentacled member? No, you never have; for all the human hands that you have seen have been stretched to you in kindness or fellowship. Yet, though the eyes can hate, and the lips can sting, it is only that dangling member that can gather the accumulated essence of evil, and electrify it into currents of destruction. Satan may enter into man by many doors, but in the hands alone can he find the servants of his will.

Another minute, Mr. Whybrow, and you will know all about the horror of human hands.

You are nearly home now. You have turned into your street — Caspar Street — and you are in the centre of the chessboard. You can see the front window of your little four-roomed house. The street is dark, and its three lamps give only a smut of light that is more confusing than darkness. It is dark — empty, too. Nobody about; no lights in the front parlours of the houses, for the families are at tea in their kitchens; and only a random glow in a few upper rooms occupied by lodgers. Nobody about but you and your following companion, and you don't notice him. You see him so often that he is never seen. Even if you turned your head and saw him, you would only say "Good-evening" to him, and walk on. A suggestion that he was a possible murderer would not even make you laugh. It would be too silly.

And now you are at your gate. And now you have found your door key. And now you are in, and hanging up your hat and coat. The Missis has just called a greeting from the kitchen, whose smell is an echo of that greeting (herrings!) and you have answered it, when the door shakes under a sharp knock.

Go away, Mr. Whybrow. Go away from that door. Don't touch it. Get right away from it. Get out of the house. Run with the Missis to the back garden, and over the fence. Or call the neighbours. But don't touch that door. Don't, Mr. Whybrow, don't open . . .

Mr. Whybrow opened the door.

That was the beginning of what became known as London's Strangling Horrors. Horrors they were called because they were something more than murders: they were motiveless, and there was an air of black magic about them. Each murder was committed at a time when the street where the bodies were found was empty of any perceptible or possible murderer. There would be an empty alley. There would be a policeman at its end. He would turn his back on the empty alley for less than a minute. Then he would look round and run into the night with news of another strangling. And in any direction he looked nobody to be seen and no report to be had of anybody being seen. Or he would be on duty in a long-quiet street, and suddenly be called to a house of dead people whom a few seconds earlier he had seen alive. And, again, whichever way he looked no-

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body to be seen; and although police whistles put an immediate cordon around the area, and searched all houses, no possible murderer to be found.

The first news of the murder of Mr. and Mrs. Whybrow was brought by the station sergeant. He had been walking through Caspar Street on his way to the station for duty, when he noticed the open door of No. 98. Glancing in, he saw by the gaslight of the passage a motionless body on the floor. After a second look he blew his whistle, and when the constables answered him he took one to join him in a search of the house, and sent others to watch all neighbouring streets, and make inquiries at adjoining houses. But neither in the house nor in the streets was anything found to indicate the murderer. Neighbours on either side, and opposite, were questioned, but they had seen nobody about, and had heard nothing. One had heard Mr. Whybrow come home — the scrape of his latchkey in the door was so regular an evening sound, he said, that you could set your watch by it for half past six — but he had heard nothing more than the sound of the opening door until the sergeant's whistle. Nobody had been seen to enter the house or leave it, by front or back, and the necks of the dead people carried no finger prints or other traces. A nephew was called in to go over the house, but he could find nothing missing; and anyway his uncle possessed nothing worth stealing. The little money in the house was untouched, and there were no signs of any disturbance of the property, or even of struggle. No signs of anything but brutal and wanton murder.

Mr. Whybrow was known to neighbours and workmates as a quiet, likeable, home-loving man; such a man as could not have any enemies. But, then, murdered men seldom have. A relentless enemy who hates a man to the point of wanting to hurt him seldom wants to murder him, since to do that puts him beyond suffering. So the police were left with an impossible situation: no clue to the murderer and no motive for the murders; only the fact that they had been done.

The first news of the affair sent a tremor through London generally, and an electric thrill through all Mallon End. Here was a murder of two inoffensive people, not for gain and not for revenge; and the murderer, to whom, apparently, killing was a casual impulse, was at large. He had left no traces, and, provided he had no companions, there seemed no reason why he should not remain at large. Any clear-headed man who stands alone, and has no fear of God or man, can, if he chooses, hold a city, even a nation, in subjection; but your everyday criminal is seldom clear-headed, and dislikes being lonely. He needs, if not the support of confederates, at least somebody to talk to; his vanity needs the satisfaction of perceiving at first hand the effect of his work. For this he will frequent bars and coffee shops and other public

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places. Then, sooner or later, in a glow of comradeship, he will utter the one word too much; and the nark, who is everywhere, has an easy job.

But though the doss houses and saloons and other places were "combed" and set with watches, and it was made known by whispers that good money and protection were assured to those with information, nothing attaching to the Whybrow case could be found. The murderer clearly had no friends and kept no company. Known men of this type were called up and questioned, but each was able to give a good account of himself; and in a few days the police were at a dead end. Against the constant public gibe that the thing had been done almost under their noses, they became restive, and for four days each man of the force was working his daily beat under a strain. On the fifth day they became still more restive.

It was the season of annual teas and entertainments for the children of the Sunday Schools, and on an evening of fog, when London was a world of groping phantoms, a small girl, in the bravery of best Sunday frock and shoes, shining face and new-washed hair, set out from Logan Passage for St. Michael's Parish Hall. She never got there. She was not actually dead until half past six, but she was as good as dead from the moment she left her mother's door. Somebody like a man pacing the street from which the Passage led, saw her come out; and from that moment she was dead. Through the fog somebody's large white hands reached after her, and in fifteen minutes they were about her.

At half past six a whistle screamed trouble, and those answering it found the body of little Nellie Vrinoff in a warehouse entry in Minnow Street. The sergeant was first among them, and he posted his men to useful points, ordering them here and there in the tart tones of repressed rage, and berating the officer whose beat the street was. "I saw you, Magson, at the end of the lane. What were you up to there? You were there ten minutes before you turned." Magson began an explanation about keeping an eye on a suspicious-looking character at that end, but the sergeant cut him short: "Suspicious characters be damned. You don't want to look for suspicious characters. You want to look for *murderers.* Messing about . . . and then this happens right where you ought to be. Now think what they'll say."

With the speed of ill news came the crowd, pale and perturbed; and on the story that the unknown monster had appeared again, and this time to a child, their faces streaked the fog with spots of hate and horror. But then came the ambulance and more police, and swiftly they broke up the crowd; and as it broke the sergeant's thought was thickened into words, and from all sides came low murmurs of "Right under their noses." Later inquiries showed that four people of the district, above suspicion, had passed that entry at intervals of seconds before the murder, and seen nothing and

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heard nothing. None of them had passed the child alive or seen her dead. None of them had seen anybody in the street except themselves. Again the police were left with no motive and with no clue.

And now the district, as you will remember, was given over, not to panic, for the London public never yields to that, but to apprehension and dismay. If these things were happening in their familiar streets, then anything might happen. Wherever people met — in the streets, the markets and the shops — they debated the one topic. Women took to bolting their windows and doors at the first fall of dusk. They kept their children closely under their eye. They did their shopping before dark, and watched anxiously, while pretending they weren't watching, for the return of their husbands from work. Under the Cockney's semi-humorous resignation to disaster, they hid an hourly foreboding. By the whim of one man with a pair of hands the structure and tenor of their daily life were shaken, as they always can be shaken by any man contemptuous of humanity and fearless of its laws. They began to realise that the pillars that supported the peaceable society in which they lived were mere straws that anybody could snap; that laws were powerful only so long as they were obeyed; that the police were potent only so long as they were feared. By the power of his hands this one man had made a whole community do something new: he had made it think, and had left it gasping at the obvious.

And then, while it was yet gasping under his first two strokes, he made his third. Conscious of the horror that his hands had created, and hungry as an actor who has once tasted the thrill of the multitude, he made fresh advertisement of his presence; and on Wednesday morning, three days after the murder of the child, the papers carried to the breakfast tables of England the story of a still more shocking outrage.

At 9.32 on Tuesday night a constable was on duty in Jarnigan Road, and at that time spoke to a fellow officer named Petersen at the top of Clemming Street. He had seen this officer walk down that street. He could swear that the street was empty at that time, except for a lame bootblack whom he knew by sight, and who passed him and entered a tenement on the side opposite that on which his fellow officer was walking. He had the habit, as all constables had just then, of looking constantly behind him and around him, whichever way he was walking, and he was certain that the street was empty. He passed his sergeant at 9.33, saluted him, and answered his inquiry for anything seen. He reported that he had seen nothing, and passed on. His beat ended at a short distance from Clemming Street, and, having paced it, he turned and came again at 9.34 to the top of the street. He had scarcely reached it before he heard the hoarse voice of the sergeant: "Gregory! You there? Quick. Here's an-

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other. My God, it's Petersen! Garotted. Quick, call 'em up!"

That was the third of the Strangling Horrors, of which there were to be a fourth and a fifth; and the five horrors were to pass into the unknown and unknowable. That is, unknown as far as authority and the public were concerned. The identity of the murderer *was* known, but to two men only. One was the murderer himself; the other was a young journalist.

This young man, who was covering the affairs for his paper, the *Daily Torch*, was no smarter than the other zealous newspaper men who were hanging about these byways in the hope of a sudden story. But he was patient, and he hung a little closer to the case than the other fellows, and by continually staring at it he at last raised the figure of the murderer like a genie from the stones on which he had stood to do his murders.

After the first few days the men had given up any attempt at exclusive stories, for there was none to be had. They met regularly at the police station, and what little information there was they shared. The officials were agreeable to them, but no more. The sergeant discussed with them the details of each murder; suggested possible explanations of the man's methods; recalled from the past those cases that had some similarity; and on the matter of motive reminded them of the motiveless Neil Cream and the wanton John Williams, and hinted that work was being done which would soon bring the business to an end; but about that work he would not say a word. The Inspector, too, was gracefully garrulous on the thesis of Murder, but whenever one of the party edged the talk towards what was being done in this immediate matter, he glided past it. Whatever the officials knew, they were not giving it to newspaper men. The business had fallen heavily upon them, and only by a capture made by their own efforts could they rehabilitate themselves in official and public esteem. Scotland Yard, of course, was at work, and had all the station's material; but the station's hope was that they themselves would have the honour of settling the affair; and however useful the coöperation of the Press might be in other cases, they did not want to risk a defeat by a premature disclosure of their theories and plans.

So the sergeant talked at large, and propounded one interesting theory after another, all of which the newspaper men had thought of themselves.

The young man soon gave up these morning lectures on the Philosophy of Crime, and took to wandering about the streets and making bright stories out of the effect of the murders on the normal life of the people. A melancholy job made more melancholy by the district. The littered roadways, the crestfallen houses, the bleared windows — all held the acid misery that evokes no sympathy: the misery of the frustrated poet. The misery was the creation of the aliens, who were living in this makeshift

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fashion because they had no settled homes, and would neither take the trouble to make a home where they *could* settle, nor get on with their wandering.

There was little to be picked up. All he saw and heard were indignant faces, and wild conjectures of the murderer's identity and of the secret of his trick of appearing and disappearing unseen. Since a policeman himself had fallen a victim, denunciations of the force had ceased, and the unknown was now invested with a cloak of legend. Men eyed other men, as though thinking: It might be *him*. It might be *him*. They were no longer looking for a man who had the air of a Madame Tussaud murderer; they were looking for a man, or perhaps some harridan woman, who had done these particular murders. Their thoughts ran mainly on the foreign set. Such ruffianism could scarcely belong to England, nor could the bewildering cleverness of the thing. So they turned to Roumanian gipsies and Turkish carpet sellers. There, clearly, would be found the "warm" spot. These Eastern fellows — they knew all sorts of tricks, and they had no real religion — nothing to hold them within bounds. Sailors returning from those parts had told tales of conjurors who made themselves invisible; and there were tales of Egyptian and Arab potions that were used for abysmally queer purposes. Perhaps it *was* possible to them; you never knew. They were so slick and cunning, and they had such gliding movements; no Englishman could melt away as they could. Almost certainly the murderer would be found to be one of that sort — with some dark trick of his own — and just because they were sure that he *was* a magician, they felt that it was useless to look for him. He was a power, able to hold them in subjection and to hold himself untouchable. Superstition, which so easily cracks the frail shell of reason, had got into them. He could do anything he chose: he would never be discovered. These two points they settled, and they went about the streets in a mood of resentful fatalism.

They talked of their ideas to the journalist in half tones, looking right and left, as though *HE* might overhear them and visit them. And though all the district was thinking of him and ready to pounce upon him, yet, so strongly had he worked upon them, that if any man in the street — say, a small man of commonplace features and form — had cried "*I* am the Monster!" would their stifled fury have broken into flood and have borne him down and engulfed him? Or would they not suddenly have seen something unearthly in that everyday face and figure, something unearthly in his everyday boots, something unearthly about his hat, something that marked him as one whom none of their weapons could alarm or pierce? And would they not momentarily have fallen back from this devil, as the devil fell back from the Cross made by the sword of Faust, and so have given him time to escape? I do

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not know; but so fixed was their belief in his invincibility that it is at least likely that they would have made this hesitation, had such an occasion arisen. But it never did. To-day this commonplace fellow, his murder lust glutted, is still seen and observed among them as he was seen and observed all the time; but because nobody then dreamt, or now dreams, that he was what he was, they observed him then, and observe him now, as people observe a lamp-post.

Almost was their belief in his invincibility justified; for, five days after the murder of the policeman Petersen, when the experience and inspiration of the whole detective force of London were turned towards his identification and capture, he made his fourth and fifth strokes.

At nine o'clock that evening, the young newspaper man, who hung about every night until his paper was away, was strolling along Richards Lane. Richards Lane is a narrow street, partly a stall market, and partly residential. The young man was in the residential section, which carries on one side small working-class cottages, and on the other the wall of a railway goods yard. The great wall hung a blanket of shadow over the lane, and the shadow and the cadaverous outline of the now deserted market stalls gave it the appearance of a living lane that had been turned to frost in the moment between breath and death. The very lamps, that elsewhere were nimbuses of gold, had here the rigidity of gems. The journalist, feeling this message of frozen eternity, was telling himself that he was tired of the whole thing, when in one stroke the frost was broken. In the moment between one pace and another silence and darkness were racked by a high scream and through the scream a voice: "Help! help! *He's here!*"

Before he could think what movement to make, the lane came to life. As though its invisible populace had been waiting on that cry, the door of every cottage was flung open, and from them and from the alleys poured shadowy figures bent in question mark form. For a second or so they stood as rigid as the lamps; then a police whistle gave them direction, and the flock of shadows sloped up the street. The journalist followed them, and others followed him. From the main street and from surrounding streets they came, some risen from unfinished suppers, some disturbed in their ease of slippers and shirt sleeves, some stumbling on infirm limbs, and some upright, and armed with pokers or the tools of their trade. Here and there above the wavering cloud of heads moved the bold helmets of policemen. In one dim mass they surged upon a cottage whose doorway was marked by the sergeant and two constables; and voices of those behind urged them on with "Get in! Find him! Run round the back! Over the wall!" and those in front cried: "Keep back! Keep back!"

And now the fury of a mob held in thrall by unknown peril broke loose.

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He was here — on the spot. Surely this time he *could not* escape. All minds were bent upon the cottage; all energies thrust towards its doors and windows and roof; all thought was turned upon one unknown man and his extermination. So that no one man saw any other man. No man saw the narrow, packed lane and the mass of struggling shadows, and all forgot to look among themselves for the monster who never lingered upon his victims. All forgot, indeed, that they, by their mass crusade of vengeance, were affording him the perfect hiding place. They saw only the house, and they heard only the rending of woodwork and the smash of glass at back and front, and the police giving orders or crying with the chase; and they pressed on.

But they found no murderer. All they found was news of murder and a glimpse of the ambulance, and for their fury there was no other object than the police themselves, who fought against this hampering of their work.

The journalist managed to struggle through to the cottage door, and to get the story from the constable stationed there. The cottage was the home of a pensioned sailor and his wife and daughter. They had been at supper, and at first it appeared that some noxious gas had smitten all three in mid-action. The daughter lay dead on the hearthrug, with a piece of bread and butter in her hand. The father had fallen sideways from his chair, leaving on his plate a filled spoon of rice pudding. The mother lay half under the table, her lap filled with the pieces of a broken cup and splashes of cocoa. But in three seconds the idea of gas was dismissed. One glance at their necks showed that this was the Strangler again; and the police stood and looked at the room and momentarily shared the fatalism of the public. They were helpless.

This was his fourth visit, making seven murders in all. He was to do, as you know, one more — and to do it that night; and then he was to pass into history as the unkown London horror, and return to the decent life that he had always led, remembering little of what he had done, and worried not at all by the memory. Why did he stop? Impossible to say. Why did he begin? Impossible again. It just happened like that; and if he thinks at all of those days and nights, I surmise that he thinks of them as we think of foolish or dirty little sins that we committed in childhood. We say that they were not really sins, because we were not then consciously ourselves: we had not come to realisation; and we look back at that foolish little creature that we once were, and forgive him because he didn't know. So, I think, with this man.

There are plenty like him. Eugene Aram, after the murder of Daniel Clarke, lived a quiet, contented life for fourteen years, unhaunted by his crime and unshaken in his self-esteem. Dr. Crippen murdered his wife, and then lived pleasantly with his mistress in the house under whose floor he had

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buried the wife. Constance Kent, found Not Guilty of the murder of her young brother, led a peaceful life for five years before she confessed. George Joseph Smith and William Palmer lived amiably among their fellows untroubled by fear or by remorse for their poisonings and drownings. Charles Peace, at the time he made his one unfortunate essay, had settled down into a respectable citizen with an interest in antiques. It happened that, after a lapse of time, these men were discovered, but more murderers than we guess are living decent lives to-day, and will die in decency, undiscovered and unsuspected. As this man will.

But he had a narrow escape, and it was perhaps this narrow escape that brought him to a stop. The escape was due to an error of judgment on the part of the journalist.

As soon as he had the full story of the affair, which took some time, he spent fifteen minutes on the telephone, sending the story through, and at the end of the fifteen minutes, when the stimulus of the business had left him, he felt physically tired and mentally dishevelled. He was not yet free to go home; the paper would not go away for another hour; so he turned into a bar for a drink and some sandwiches.

It was then, when he had dismissed the whole business from his mind, and was looking about the bar and admiring the landlord's taste in watch chains and his air of domination, and was thinking that the landlord of a well-conducted tavern had a more comfortable life than a newspaper man, that his mind received from nowhere a spark of light. He was not thinking about the Strangling Horrors; his mind was on his sandwich. As a public-house sandwich, it was a curiosity. The bread had been thinly cut, it was buttered, and the ham was not two months stale; it was ham as it should be. His mind turned to the inventor of this refreshment, the Earl of Sandwich, and then to George the Fourth, and then to the Georges, and to the legend of that George who was worried to know how the apple got into the apple dumpling. He wondered whether George would have been equally puzzled to know how the ham got into the ham sandwich, and how long it would have been before it occurred to him that the ham could not have got there unless somebody had put it there. He got up to order another sandwich, and in that moment a little active corner of his mind settled the affair. If there was ham in his sandwich, somebody must have put it there. If seven people had been murdered, somebody must have been there to murder them. There was no aeroplane or automobile that would go into a man's pocket; therefore that somebody must have escaped either by running away or standing still; and again therefore ——

He was visualising the front-page story that his paper would carry if his theory were correct, and if — a matter of conjecture — his editor had the

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necessary nerve to make a bold stroke, when a cry of "Time, gentlemen, please! All out!" reminded him of the hour. He got up and went out into a world of mist, broken by the ragged discs of roadside puddles and the streaming lightning of motor buses. He was certain that he had *the* story, but, even if it were proved, he was doubtful whether the policy of his paper would permit him to print it. It had one great fault. It was truth, but it was impossible truth. It rocked the foundations of everything that newspaper readers believed and that newspaper editors helped them to believe. They might believe that Turkish carpet sellers had the gift of making themselves invisible. They would not believe this.

As it happened, they were not asked to, for the story was never written. As his paper had by now gone away, and as he was nourished by his refreshment and stimulated by his theory, he thought he might put in an extra half hour by testing that theory. So he began to look about for the man he had in mind — a man with white hair, and large white hands; otherwise an everyday figure whom nobody would look twice at. He wanted to spring his idea on this man without warning, and he was going to place himself within reach of a man armoured in legends of dreadfulness and grue. This might appear to be an act of supreme courage — that one man, with no hope of immediate outside support, should place himself at the mercy of one who was holding a whole parish in terror. But it wasn't. He didn't think about the risk. He didn't think about his duty to his employers or loyalty to his paper. He was moved simply by an instinct to follow a story to its end.

He walked slowly from the tavern and crossed into Fingal Street, making for Deever Market, where he had hope of finding his man. But his journey was shortened. At the corner of Lotus Street he saw him — or a man who looked like him. This street was poorly lit, and he could see little of the man: but he *could* see white hands. For some twenty paces he stalked him; then drew level with him; and at a point where the arch of a railway crossed the street, he saw that this was his man. He approached him with the current conversational phrase of the district: "Well, seen anything of the murderer?" The man stopped to look sharply at him; then, satisfied that the journalist was not the murderer, said:

"Eh? No, nor's anybody else, curse it. Doubt if they ever will."

"I don't know. I've been thinking about them, and I've got an idea."

"So?"

"Yes. Came to me all of a sudden. Quarter of an hour ago. And I'd felt that we'd all been blind. It's been staring us in the face."

The man turned again to look at him, and the look and the movement held suspicion of this man who seemed to know so much. "Oh? Has it? Well, why not give us the benefit of it?"

"I'm going to." They walked level,

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and were nearly at the end of the little street where it meets Deever Market, when the journalist turned casually to the man. He put a finger on his arm. "Yes, it seems to me quite simple now. But there's still one point I don't understand. One little thing I'd like to clear up. I mean the motive. Now, as man to man, tell me, Sergeant Ottermole, just *why* did you kill all those inoffensive people?"

The sergeant stopped, and the journalist stopped. There was just enough light from the sky, which held the reflected light of the continent of London, to give him a sight of the sergeant's face, and the sergeant's face was turned to him with a wide smile of such urbanity and charm that the journalist's eyes were frozen as they met it. The smile stayed for some seconds. Then said the sergeant: "Well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Newspaper Man, I don't know. I really don't know. In fact, I've been worried about it myself. But I've got an idea — just like you. Everybody knows that we can't control the workings of our minds. Don't they? Ideas come into our minds without asking. But everybody's supposed to be able to control his body. Why? Eh? We get our minds from lord-knows-where — from people who were dead hundreds of years before we were born. Mayn't we get our bodies in the same way? Our faces — our legs — our heads — they aren't completely ours. We don't make 'em. They come to us. And couldn't ideas come into our bodies like ideas come into our minds? Eh? Can't ideas live in nerve and muscle as well as in brain? Couldn't it be that parts of our bodies aren't really us, and couldn't ideas come into those parts all of a sudden, like ideas come into — into" — he shot his arms out, showing the great white-gloved hands and hairy wrists; shot them out so swiftly to the journalist's throat that his eyes never saw them — "into *my hands!*"

Did you—

Get Him Out Of This?

(*Solution to puzzle on inside front cover*)

Snip Carton, summing up the situation in a flash, hurls the bomb at the glass tank and smashes it. Water pours into the room, extinguishing the bomb-fuse and flooding the poison-gas gratings. Snip quickly picks up a large splinter of glass, wraps the large end in his handkerchief to give him a grip, and with this as a weapon deftly stabs the octopus to death. As Snip has shrewdly deduced, the octopus received air and food from an opening at the top of the tank. Snip finds the opening and makes his way to safety.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR!

One New Year's Eve, near midnight, Q. Patrick discovered that they had left some important notes in their office, located at that time in a metropolitan skyscraper. They needed these memoranda for a novel on which they intended to work over the holiday weekend. So they went to the office building, rang the night bell, and after a suspenseful wait, were finally admitted by an unfamiliar watchman who, oddly enough, had only one eye and looked almost melodramatically sinister.

The night watchman took Q. Patrick up to their office — on the top floor — by elevator, but then informed them that they would have to find their own way down by the stairs, as he had his "rounds to make." The authors gathered their notes and prepared to leave.

It was now almost midnight to the minute — the witching hour. Suddenly Q. Patrick realized that they did not know where the stairs were. They groped their way through dark corridors, and finally located a fire escape, but they lived a lifetime on that trip to the fire escape . . . It is extraordinary how strange one's familiar office can be late at night, when it is dark and deserted — how strange and how terrifying. The thought of being shut in is always frightening, but being trapped at the top of a skyscraper seems to possess a nightmare quality all its own . . .

Then, suddenly, from far below, rising out of the unknown, came the peal of bells, the Doomsday din of horns, and the faint rumble of crowds celebrating in the streets . . .

In that dark, forbidding stairway it occurred to Q. Patrick: this is stark terror — but suppose there was a murderer in the building, prowling the corridors and passageways — looking for us! And then came an even more terrifying thought: suppose that murderer were a person whom they knew, an office colleague, someone whom they liked and trusted — in the daytime . . .

MURDER ON NEW YEAR'S EVE

by Q. PATRICK

IT WAS quite unreasonable to feel afraid. There should, Carole Thorne told herself, be nothing alarming about returning to one's office after business hours. And yet, as the tower elevator let her off at Leland &

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Rowley's, she felt an odd moment of apprehension — an instinctive desire to get into the elevator again, to let it carry her down those forty floors of the Moderna Building.

Carole stamped the snow from her overshoes and told herself she was a fool. Business buildings were always a bit spooky at night, anyhow. Besides, to Carole a dark office brought back uneasy memories of Christmas Eve, of that disturbing encounter with Miles Shenton. In fact, it had been partly to avoid seeing Miles when he came for the stockholders' meeting tonight that she had slipped out to the hairdresser's an hour ago.

"Miss Thorne!" She started at the sound of the elevator man's voice behind her. "You're not forgetting the tower elevator service stops at six. If your meeting isn't through by then, the stockholders will have to walk down to the thirtieth floor and take the regular night elevator from there." The man grinned. "Good night, Miss Thorne. Happy New Year!"

Happy New Year! Carole had almost forgotten it was New Year's Eve. Appropriate that the last day of the old year should be the last day for the Leland & Rowley Process Company. Already the office looked deserted and abandoned.

There was no sound of life except the faint drone of voices from Mr. Rowley's office, where the stockholders were probably in the very act of voting away the company's corporate existence. Carole took off her hat and coat and moved toward her desk outside the president's office. She could hear Peter Howe's voice now, pleasant, reassuring. He was telling the stockholders how rich the merger with the Pan-American Dye Combine would make them.

It still seemed incredible that Peter Howe, the company's vice-president and her boss's nephew, was actually in love with her, Carole Thorne, who had nothing much to recommend her except rather nice blonde hair and a real appreciation of Mr. Howe. . . .

She had actually sat down at her desk before she noticed the sheet of paper slipped into her typewriter. It must have been put there during her brief absence from the office.

Curiously, she pulled the sheet from the machine. She read:

MEMORANDUM TO:

Mr. Rowley	Miss Leland
Mr. Howe	Mr. Whitfield
Mr. Shenton	Mr. Barber
Miss Gregg	

The blood drained from her cheeks as her gaze moved to the actual message:

This is to warn you that the merger with Pan-American Dye is not going through. Of course, you're planning to have it carried at the meeting by an overwhelming majority. *But it is not going through.*

Remember — it cannot become legally valid until midnight, anyhow. If enough of the largest stockholders died before then, fifty-one per cent of

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the stock could change hands, couldn't it? The heirs of the deceased would undoubtedly demand a new vote. Think it over when you turn in your ballot slips.

Because, if the merger is carried, I have decided to murder several of you — and, if necessary, all of you.

You'll have plenty of time to consider whether you want to — *exit before midnight!*

Carole stared dazedly. A threat of murder! Could this be a practical joke?

"So you're staying to be in at the death, Miss Thorne?"

Carole spun around. Little Mr. Whitfield, the company's lawyer, had slipped out of the president's office. His thin, birdlike fingers were picking up his brief-case, which had been lying on her desk.

"Mr. Whitfield!" Carole threw out a hand to detain him. But the little man had scurried back into the lighted room.

For a second Carole hesitated; then she made up her mind that she couldn't risk the responsibility of keeping this to herself. She would have to go in — interrupt the stockholders' meeting at once.

When she pushed open the door of the president's office, the large room was portentously silent. Grouped around in chairs, the score or so of stockholders were bent over ballot slips, signing their names. So it was too late to do anything about it anyway, she thought.

Carole noticed Mr. Rowley's gaze on her, inquiring, annoyed. Some of the stockholders had looked up, too. To whom should she take this mad memorandum? Not to Mr. Rowley — the shock might bring on one of his heart attacks.

Peter Howe, of course.

The young vice-president was sitting at the far end of the room next to Mr. Barber, the representative from Pan-American Dye. There was something reassuring about Peter's athletically square shoulders.

Carole hurried to his side and slipped the note into his hand. "I just found it, Peter. In my typewriter."

His gray eyes went very grave as he read. He glanced at her; then, with a quick "You'd better stay, Carole," he passed the paper on to Mr. Barber.

Carole dropped into an empty chair at his side. Miss Gregg, the company's plump, bespectacled treasurer, was bustling officiously around, collecting the ballot slips. The merger was going to be carried, of course. Carole knew that this hastily summoned meeting was a mere formality.

The names on the memorandum kept repeating themselves in Carole's mind. Miss Gregg was one of them, little Mr. Whitfield, the lawyer, Mr. Rowley, and Peter. And Mr. Barber from Pan-American, the stocky man with the alert, bushy-browed eyes who was bending over the note with Peter.

Then there was Miles, too. He was on the list. Although she deliberately did not look at him, Carole was acutely conscious of Miles Shenton, Na-

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thaniel Leland's erratic but brilliant young protégé, who had inherited the old man's unfinished work and his position as head research chemist for the company.

Carole could sense the maddeningly amused half-smile on his dark face with its high cheekbones and its slanting, insolent eyes. He had smiled that way when she had found him in the office on Christmas Eve after he had broken their date for earlier in the evening. He had smiled that way when he had started to make violent love to her in this very room. He had smiled that way, too, when he had casually let her know he was going out after the wealthy Marcia Leland as a "permanent meal ticket."

And his future meal ticket, Marcia Leland, was sitting there at his side. Slim, young, exquisitely dressed. Like some sea nymph, thought Carole, with her dark hair cut to her shoulders and those green, strangely observant eyes. And yet Marcia had inherited twenty thousand shares from her father, Nathaniel Leland. That fragile girl would logically be the murderer's first victim.

Miss Gregg's brisk fingers had counted through the ballot slips and proxies now. Her spectacles flashing, she whispered something to Mr. Rowley. The president rose, his thin fingers twisting the long, steel paper knife which always lay on his desk. "Ladies and gentlemen, the merger has been carried by a ninety per cent majority. The papers which Mr. Barber and I will now sign are dated as of tomorrow, January first. The merger will legally go into effect at midnight."

Amidst a flutter of approval from the stockholders, Mr. Barber crossed to Mr. Rowley's side. The two men were signing their names. Carole glanced anxiously at Peter.

"Peter," she whispered, "what are you going to do?"

"Barber thinks we should ask the people threatened to stay behind afterwards."

"You — you don't think it's serious?"

She could tell from the expression in his eyes that he was worried, but he smiled reassuringly. "Probably just a crank."

The documents were signed. Slowly Mr. Rowley leaned over his desk and speared with his paper knife the final sheet of the old year's calendar. He held it out with a little dramatic flourish. "December the thirty-first, ladies and gentlemen. The end of an old year, the end of a fine company, and the end of my own business activities. As you know, I retire with the signing of the merger. There remains nothing but to wish you a happy and a prosperous New Year."

As the stockholders prepared to leave, Peter rose and asked those mentioned on the memorandum to stay behind. The others moved out into the main office. Almost immediately Carole heard the elevator doors clang shut behind them. She glanced at her watch. Exactly six o'clock. With a queer pricking of

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larm, she realized that the tower elevator had made its last trip.

Mr. Rowley's large office seemed austere and empty now that the majority of the stockholders had left. The people whose names had been called were grouped apprehensively around the desk. Peter had started to read out the crazy message.

When he had finished, there was a moment of unbroken silence. Then he said, "I thought you all ought to hear it." His mouth moved wryly. "Personally, I don't think these formidable threats will be put into action. But if anyone is nervous . . ."

"Certainly I'm nervous," snapped Miss Gregg, the treasurer. "We must consult the police at once. A threat of murder! Disgraceful!"

"But ingenious." Miles Shenton was standing at Marcia Leland's side, an ironical smile in his dark eyes. "Killing off major stockholders to get a new vote on the merger!"

"We cannot afford to treat this lightly," broke in Mr. Rowley. "Mergers always cause bad feeling. This was probably written by some employee who's losing his work. He may conceivably be desperate enough to attempt something — er — rash."

While he was speaking, Mr. Whitfield, the company's lawyer, had been moving jerkily to and fro the zipper of the briefcase which he had taken from Carole's desk. Now he gave a sudden exclamation. "Wait a minute!" he cried. "I think I understand. "This threat *is* serious — terribly serious. Some of us are in very real danger. We —" His voice was high, breathless. "As Mr. Rowley's lawyer, I have no right to make a statement. But I can see no alternative. This is a question of life or —"

He never finished his sentence . . . for suddenly, without the slightest warning, the lights in the president's office went out, plunging the room into swift, blinding darkness.

Voices called out; arms brushed against Carole. Instinctively she groped her way to the light switch. When she reached it, someone else was already there.

"The switch doesn't work." It was Miles's casual voice, close to her ear. "Fuse must have gone. If it has, all this side of the floor will be in darkness. And the main office, too."

"Better move over to my office." Peter's suggestion was calm and steady. "It's on the other circuit."

There was a general movement toward the door. In an uncertain little procession, they all passed out into the main office which separated them from the group of private offices on the east side of the building. Miles had been right. All the lights in the main office had gone, too.

Peter had hurried ahead. In a few moments a beam of light filtered toward them from his office. Shortly, they were all hovering anxiously around his desk.

"Well, Mr. Whitfield" — Peter's voice was abrupt, jerky — "you had something very important to tell us and —" He broke off.

Carole looked around quickly and

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saw what was wrong. The lawyer was not in the room.

There was a murmur of startled comment. Mr. Rowley glanced at the open door and then at Carole. "Perhaps you would ask Mr. Whitfield to come here, Miss Thorne," he said.

She moved to the door, the president's voice trailing impatiently after her as she hurried out again into the main office, away from the beam of light. It was somehow uncanny being in the darkness alone. As quickly as possible she retraced her steps to Mr. Rowley's office and paused at the door. "Mr. Whitfield."

There was no sound. She crossed the threshold.

"Mr. Whitfield!"

Step by step, she moved forward. Her foot touched something lying on the carpet. Instantly she froze. The darkness around her seemed to stir. . . . She forced herself to bend, to touch that thing with her finger. It was hard, slick — the leather of a shoe. Her hand moved, groping through the darkness. It touched something else, something soft — limp. She knew what it was — knew with absolute certainty. Her fingers had touched a human hand.

At first she just stood there, numbed by the shock. Then she heard her own voice. She hardly recognized it, it sounded so small and lost. She was calling, "Quick — Mr. Rowley!"

She could hear footsteps, faint and then nearer — hurrying. In a few seconds there were voices, rustlings, movements all around her.

A hand gripped her arm, and Peter's voice, low, urgent, was asking "Carole, what is it?"

"It's — it's someone," she faltered "Lying there in front of me. I felt his hand. I — I think he's —"

Someone struck a match. It was Miles. Carole could see his dark, high-cheekboned face, the only illuminated thing in that room. Then another match was struck, and another. The little troop of flames lighted up the carpet in front of her. Mechanically her gaze moved downward.

Mr. Whitfield was lying there, slumped beneath the desk — looking pathetically small and unobtrusive, with his fingers still clutched around his briefcase. The match light cast strange little rays across his face. The match light caught something else, too. Still adorned by the crumpled sheet from the calendar, the shining steel handle of Mr. Rowley's paper knife protruded from the lawyer's vest, just above the heart.

Peter had dropped to his knees and was bending over the body. Carole waited for him to speak, but she knew before he said it what it would be.

"Dead."

A fresh sputter of matches. And then Peter's voice again, suddenly different: "Look!"

Rapidly his fingers were smoothing out the sheet from the calendar which, still impaled on the knife, was half thrust into the wound. With the others, Carole peered down in the uncertain matchlight. She saw at once what he meant.

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The date which the president had speared during the meeting had been December 31. Now, glaring up at them in bold black print was:

JANUARY
1

At the farthermost edge of the arc of light Carole could just see the loose-leaf calendar for the new year on the desk. It showed January 2.

"You see" — Peter's voice rose again, steady but very grim — "he put it there, the murderer. Number One. He meant us to know that Mr. Whitfield was the first — that there will be others —"

Gradually Carole's mind began to take in the full implications of this appalling thing. The person who had typed out that memorandum must somehow have fused the lights on this circuit and crept into the room in the consequent confusion. He was carrying out his incredible threat. Mr. Whitfield had owned ten thousand of the hundred thousand shares outstanding. He had been the first to go.

The last match had flickered out now and no one seemed to think to light another. There was a long, helpless silence. Then Carole heard the familiar clatter of the telephone receiver and Mr. Rowley's distracted voice at the desk, shouting: "Hello, hello! Give me the police station. Hello . . ."

"You won't get any reply, Mr. Rowley," Carole said. "The operator left the switchboard at five."

"Operator?" echoed the president. "Oh, yes, of course. Well . . ."

"I'll try and work the switchboard."

"Yes, yes. Thanks, Miss Thorne."

"You're not going alone, Carole," cut in Peter's voice. "I'm coming with you."

Somehow Carole found Peter and they were groping their way together out into the main office.

The switchboard was in a corner of the main office, close to the elevator shaft. They found their way to it with nothing to guide them but the faint light emanating from Peter's distant office. Carole sat down at the board, struggling to remember the little she knew about it. She put on the earphones and started to push in plug after plug.

"Hello . . . hello . . ."

One plug after another. She worked with growing anxiety. But it was no use. The instrument seemed absolutely dead.

The others had left Mr. Rowley's office now. They were all crowding around her in the darkness.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Rowley," she said at length; "I'm afraid I can't work it."

There was a spurt of light. Carole saw Miles Shenton with a cigarette lighter cupped in his hand. He was bending forward, peering behind the switchboard. He gave a low whistle. "I'm not surprised Miss Thorne can't work it. The wires are cut."

"Cut!" echoed Miss Gregg weakly.

Mr. Rowley's voice rose, hoarse, uncertain: "Then we must use the elevator. Go down to the ground

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floor, Peter, and tell the night watchman . . ."

"I've been ringing the buzzer, Uncle. Nothing happens."

"It's no use, anyway," said Carole faintly. "The tower elevator stopped running at six."

"But — but what can we do?"

"The fire stairs," said Carole. "We'll have to walk down to the thirtieth floor, to the main building, and take the regular elevator there."

Her words galvanized the others into action. They all started to hurry back through the main office, stumbling over chairs and desks. Carole felt herself pushed along with the rest of them. They reached the door to the stairs. Someone struck a match. Miss Gregg gripped the handle and pushed. Nothing happened.

More matches. Peter tried. Then Miles. They all pushed together feverishly. But it did not give. "It must be wedged," Peter said. "Wedged from outside. We'll never open it."

"But the fire alarm." It was an unfamiliar voice — Mr. Barber's.

Carole answered, "It's outside the door — on the fire tower. We can't get to it."

"Cut off!" It was Mr. Rowley's voice, shrilling to a crescendo. "It can't be true."

But Carole knew it was. Locked in at the top of the tower, with a dead body, in an office that was less than half lighted. Cut off in the very heart of Manhattan! She stood there, her arms limp at her sides.

It was Peter who finally said, "There's no use standing around here. Better get back to my office."

To Carole it was an immense relief to return to the brightly lit room. The broad desk, the shiny chairs — they were so essentially a part of normal business routine, so essentially part of Peter. And it was to Peter, instinctively, that the others looked for the next move.

Peter stood by the window, his blond face very grave, his chin thrust forward grimly. "Well," he said, "we're up against it, all right. But we've got to keep our heads."

"There must be some way out," exclaimed Mr. Barber. The representative of Pan-American Dye had sat down behind the desk. "A modern office — cut off! It's impossible. Surely we could do something — drop a message out of the window."

"Unfortunately, we are in a tower, and the message would only fall onto the roof of the main building ten floors below," said Miles. "It stretches all around."

Mr. Rowley looked up with a harsh, bitter laugh. "So we've just got to wait here and let ourselves be killed!"

"But there must be a night watchman," persisted Mr. Barber.

"There is," said Peter. "He's due to plug in here about midnight."

"If he's sober," added Miles. "He has a marked tendency toward celebrating holidays. I very much doubt whether he'll attain to the top floor for a long time."

"So we *will* be here." Miss Gregg's

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voice rose to a stifled little sob. "We *will* be here until midnight."

In the sudden shock of finding themselves shut in, they had not thought of that — had not thought how long it would be before they could hope for release. Carole's heart sank. Shut in all night. What couldn't happen? What . . . ?

And then she remembered something. "The cleaning service!" she exclaimed. "It works at night. They'll be here soon."

"Good for Miss Thorne." Miles grinned. "Saved by the scrubwomen. When do they get here?"

"I think somewhere around nine."

Marcia Leland glanced at her watch. "It's nearly seven now. Only two more hours."

"Well, it's obvious what we've got to do." Peter's voice was steady. "Stay together in this lighted room."

"But this — this maniac who killed poor Mr. Whitfield!" The treasurer was twisting her plump fingers together. "How do we know he's not still somewhere in the office?"

"Exactly, Miss Gregg." Peter's glance moved to Miles. "Shenton and I had better make sure. We'll turn on all the lights that work on this side of the office and search the place thoroughly."

"Quite a tricky proposition — searching for a murderer in the dark," murmured Miles.

Marcia Leland had been sitting apart as if absorbed in her own thoughts. Now she pushed the dark hair back from her face and said, surprisingly, "You could use paper spills. I'll make some for you."

She rose, moving to the desk. Swiftly she twisted pieces of paper into tapers. She gave some to Peter, some to Miles. "That ought to be better than nothing."

"The superwoman!" Miles's smile was amusedly admiring.

He and Peter set matches to the spills. Cupping them in their hands, they slipped out of the room.

With their departure, the rest of the group started to talk feverishly, to plan, to speculate. Who could be doing this? Was it an employee of the company or some unknown maniac?

Carole moved to the door and peered out, following with her eyes the little flickering lights that marked the two men's progress away through the office. What if they did find this — this person lurking somewhere in the darkness? He had already murdered one man. He would be desperate, probably armed. What could they do against him without weapons?

Peter and Miles! How absurdly trivial her own problems seemed now. She had been worrying about whether she could bring herself to tell Peter the truth: that she liked him more than anyone she knew; that she respected him; that there was nothing to stop her growing to love him if only it hadn't all happened so suddenly, if only she could shake off those maddening memories of Miles.

". . . I knew we should have called in the police as soon as Miss Thorne brought us that terrible note." Miss

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Gregg's emphatic voice broke into her thoughts.

"But we never had a chance." Marcia Leland's answering tone was cool, imperturbable. "Don't you see, Miss Gregg? Everything was worked out beforehand. Probably the telephone was already cut and the door jammed before the note was put in Miss Thorne's typewriter."

Carole glanced curiously from one woman to the other. It was strange, she thought, how shock and danger brought out characteristics one would not have guessed. Miss Gregg had been the company's treasurer ever since anyone could remember. For years she had bullied the girls, harassed the executives, and kept her ledgers with machine-like accuracy. Miss Gregg, Carole would have thought, could have stood up against anything. But now the treasurer was obviously on the verge of a collapse.

And it was Marcia Leland who had risen to the occasion; Marcia Leland, the young, fragile girl just out of college, the woman whom the merger was to make a millionairess. Carole had been jealous of Marcia, antagonistic because of Miles. She admitted that to herself. But she could not help admiring her now.

But then, of course, she had already faced death that year. Carole remembered how, at the time of his final attack six months before, Nathaniel Leland had been alone with his daughter, working in a make-shift laboratory in Florida, where he had been sent by his doctor. The old man had guessed he was marked by death and had been desperately eager to complete his new chemical processes which were going to revolutionize the industry and restore the prosperity of Leland & Rowley. But death had cheated him. He had died, leaving behind him only a few worthless notebooks. And this slight girl had given up a brilliant career as a physicist to take care of him. She had nursed him to the very end. Peter and Mr. Rowley, who had flown down to Florida when the news of Leland's death came through, had returned full of admiration for Marcia's courage.

Footsteps outside in the main office deflected Carole's attention. She turned and saw the vague light of tapers, quivering in the darkness. Miles and Peter were back.

"Well?" asked Miss Gregg sharply.

Peter moved to Carole's side, giving her a brief, fleeting smile. "We've searched everywhere. There's no one there."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mr. Barber. "How could this man have got out?"

"Simple." Miles dropped down on the couch next to Marcia, his eyes resting for one moment on Carole. "He must have got the wedges all ready and kept them outside on the fire tower. After the murder he just had to slip out of the door and jam it behind him."

"But I can't believe that." Marcia Leland leaned forward. "He's trying to kill off the major stockholders before midnight. If — if he really means

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that, he'd never leave us all locked up here and go away."

"He would," explained Miles slowly, "if he intended to come back."

"Come back!" echoed Miss Gregg.

"Why, of course. He's bound to enter before midnight again." Miles's smile was slightly mocking. "Several times, in fact. After all, Mr. Whitfield owned only ten thousand shares. Our friend has to kill off at least forty-one per cent more if he wants a new vote on the merger."

"Then if the murderer's not here at the moment," Carole said quickly, "we've got to think out some way of stopping him from getting back."

"The efficient secretary speaks!" Miles gave her a mock bow. "In spite of Howe's scornful comments, I have already contrived a burglar alarm, an ingenious device of my own invention: three chairs piled against the door, with a glass water cooler perched on top. If anyone opens that door we'll hear it."

"Provided your theory's correct."

Carole started at the sound of Peter's voice. She glanced at him quickly. There was a strained look in his gray eyes.

"Does anyone really believe the murderer ever left the office?" he asked.

"But you searched," cried Miss Gregg. "And you didn't find anyone."

"We didn't. But does what Shenton says make sense? Could anybody have fused the lights in some other room and then crept into Uncle's office and committed the murder? How would he have known where the paper knife was . . . or the calendar? And how could he tell in the darkness where Mr. Whitfield was?"

Peter looked down at his strong, capable hands. "If I'd been clever enough to have staged all this, I would certainly have been clever enough to have added my own name on that memorandum. It would have been easy to jam the door, go down the fire stairs, and come up again in the elevator before six, when it stopped running."

Carole leaned impulsively forward. "Oh, Peter, you can't think . . ."

"Yes." He shrugged almost apologetically. "I'm afraid it's far more likely that the murderer of Mr. Whitfield is one of us here in this room."

Carole could hear the quick beat of her own heart. Of course, what Peter said made perfect sense.

She glanced dazedly around.

Those pale, familiar faces! Against her will, suspicions began to stir in her mind. Mabel Gregg was losing her job through the merger, the job she had held for twenty years. Neither she nor Miles was being taken on by Pan-American Dye. And Mr. Rowley — this transaction was forcing him into a retirement which was only half voluntary.

And the others? Peter was getting a big job with Pan-American. The merger meant everything to him; as it did to Marcia Leland, whose great holding of stock would be trebled in value at midnight. And Mr. Barber,

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the representative of the company that was taking over. Surely none of those three could have a motive for fearing this merger.

"There's something else," Peter was saying quietly, "that makes me pretty certain the murderer *is* one of us. We've been forgetting that Mr. Whitfield was trying to tell us something when . . ."

"You mean he had it figured out?" cut in Miles swiftly. "He suddenly realized it was one of us?"

Peter nodded. "That would explain why the murderer fused the lights at that moment — to stop him. Only one of us in the room could have done that."

Mr. Barber shot a swift glance at the president. "Rowley, just before the lights went out, Mr. Whitfield mentioned your name."

"Yes," added Miles curiously. "He said something about having no right to make a statement because he was your lawyer. What did he mean?"

They had all focused their attention on the president. He stirred uneasily in his chair. "I haven't the slightest idea," he said weakly.

Suddenly Carole remembered that Mr. Whitfield had been in conference with Mr. Rowley all that afternoon. During the past few days, too, the lawyer had been coming in regularly.

Impulsively she turned to her boss. "It wasn't anything to do with those conferences you've been having with Mr. Whitfield lately?"

Mr. Rowley started. There was an almost angry gleam in his eyes. "Really, Miss Thorne, my private business with poor Whitfield has nothing whatsoever to do with this."

Another awkward moment of silence followed.

It was Marcia Leland who spoke first: "I've just remembered something." Her voice was brisk. "Just as the lights went out I heard a very faint spluttering sound."

Peter took a quick step forward. "The fuse going?"

"Yes. Don't you see? That means it was blown from the room where we all were. That would prove it was done by one of us. And if we can find out which outlet was fused, we might be able to remember which of us was standing near it."

"An excellent idea, Miss Leland." Mr. Barber was gazing at the girl admiringly. "One of us had better go right away and look at those outlets."

"I'll do it," volunteered Miles.

"No, Miles." Marcia Leland rose. "Let's all go together. We'll have to use spills again."

Marcia Leland had moved to the desk. Carole joined her, and together they folded sheets of paper. They were running short of matches, so Carole was given charge of those that were left, as well as Miles's lighter.

Keeping close together, the little group moved out into the main office. With uncertain fingers Carole lit a spill.

When they reached the door of Mr. Rowley's office Carole held the taper up so that its rays shone as far as possible into the office.

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"Miss Thorne, perhaps you know where the outlets are." Marcia Leland moved into the center of the room.

"Yes. There's one by the window."

While Carole held the taper low, Marcia stooped to inspect the plug in the wainscot. "No. We can't tell anything from that. Some sort of insulated gadget must have been used. I don't think the murderer would have been foolish enough to keep it. I imagine we'd find it left by the outlet. Is there another plug?"

"Yes, there's — there's one right by my desk." Mr. Rowley's voice was rather hoarse. "I had a desk lamp for a time." He pointed to a plug in the wall a few inches from the desk and on the same level as its surface.

"A very convenient place," mused Marcia. "Anyone could have pushed something in there without having to bend and attract attention."

"And here it is!" Miles's voice rang out excitedly. "Clue number one!"

They all spun around. From beneath a sheaf of papers on the desk, he had produced a small, two-pronged kitchen fork with a wooden handle.

"Of course!" Marcia took it and slipped it into the outlet. It fitted perfectly. "The ideal thing for fusing a plug. The murderer must have brought it in with him."

"But who . . . ?"

"Yes, who?" echoed Marcia. "Who was standing there to the left of the desk?"

"I thought it was you, Miss Leland." It was the voice of the treasurer herself. "Weren't you standing there?"

"I," said Miles softly, "thought it was Howe."

Mr. Barber's eyes were intent on the president. "Didn't you move over there, Rowley, just after you'd been speaking?"

"Well, one thing's definite," Peter's voice broke in dryly. "We're not going to get anywhere from this angle. In thirty seconds we've accused three different people. To be perfectly frank, I haven't the slightest idea where anyone was."

"I'm afraid I agree." Marcia inclined her head. "When something startling happens, like the lights going out, you don't remember what went before."

"We might as well go back to Mr. Howe's office," Carole suggested. "After all, the cleaning women ought to be here soon."

She turned. As she did so, the light from the spill struck fanwise across the surface of the desk. She gave a little gasp. "Look!" she exclaimed.

The others swung round.

Carole was pointing at the loose-leaf calendar for the new year. When last they had been in this room, the calendar had shown January 2. Now the light of the taper revealed:

JANUARY
4

Miles gave a low whistle. "The second and third — someone's taken them."

"And it must have been one of us." Mr. Barber's voice was sharp with incredulity. "That definitely proves

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that the murderer is here — here in the room."

In the uneasy silence, Marcia Leland moved forward. "It also means," she said, "that the danger isn't over yet. No. 2 and No. 3. Apparently the murderer has decided to kill two more of us."

"Come on. Let's get back to my office," said Peter brusquely. "You lead the way with the light, Carole."

Shielding the taper with her hand, she moved quickly to the door and out into the darkness of the main office.

She passed the fire stairs door with chairs piled bizarrely against it and a heavy glass cylinder gleaming dully on top. The burglar alarm! They wouldn't be needing that now, she reflected grimly. She was almost halfway to the safety of light, when she heard behind her an ominous rattle. Almost immediately it was followed by a crash that resounded like thunder around the invisible walls.

The trap on the door had been sprung! The murderer had not been one of them. He had been waiting out on the fire stairs and now he had slipped in through the door. At that very moment he was somewhere there in the darkness around her . . .

The taper slipped through Carole's fingers. In horror she watched the flame flicker a moment on the floor and then wink out. Some remote part of her brain was conscious of the others. They had burst into hectic life. She could hear them stumbling against desks and chairs, calling out to each other, shouting for lights.

And then one voice rose above the vague babel around her, loud and authoritative. It was Peter and he was shouting, "Get back to the lighted office — all of you!"

The lighted office! Safety! Carole ran toward the faint radiance ahead. When she reached Peter's room she sank into a chair.

There were hurrying footsteps outside. Someone else dashed into the room. It was Peter. "Quick, Carole! The spills, and some matches! Quick!"

Shakily she gave them to him, and he was away again before she could speak.

The others were entering now: Mr. Rowley, a frail, ghostlike figure; Mr. Barber; Miss Gregg, her graying hair falling loose and disheveled over her forehead. None of them spoke. They just stood by the open door.

Carole crossed to join them. At last Miles and Peter appeared.

"We were fooled," said Miles curtly. "No one came in through that door. The trap was knocked over from inside."

"By one of us?" exclaimed Mr. Barber.

"Yes." Peter's eyes were moving rapidly around the room. "It was a false alarm. The murderer must have done it to —" He broke off. "Where's Miss Leland?"

"Marcia!"

Miles dashed out into the darkness. Peter followed instantly, lighting a taper as he went.

Carole's gaze flickered helplessly from one face to another.

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"She's been murdered!" screamed Miss Gregg suddenly. "I know it! In the darkness, she . . ." Her voice rose to a high, hysterical laugh.

"For heaven's sake, stop it, woman!" barked Mr. Barber.

From the door Carole had been able to follow Peter's progress by the lighted taper in his hand. Suddenly he stopped, somewhere near the elevator shaft. For a second he stood absolutely still. Then he stooped and shouted, "Quick, Miles!"

Carole drew in her breath. The light of the downward-pointing taper had revealed the prostrate figure of a woman.

The spill burned out almost immediately, and darkness swallowed up what Carole had seen. Behind her, in the lighted office, Miss Gregg had stopped sobbing now. As Carole peered urgently forward she saw figures approaching. Peter first — then Miles. In his arms Miles was carrying a vague, slim form.

"Miss Leland," exclaimed Mr. Barber. "Is — is she —?"

"No." Peter crossed to the couch and piled the cushions up at one end. "Looks as though someone tried to strangle her. But she's still breathing!"

Miles carried the unconscious girl to the couch.

Carole moved forward. Marcia's eyes were closed, her lips half parted. On her throat were long, inflamed marks.

Mr. Rowley was fluttering helplessly around. "One of us attacking Miss Leland! I can't believe it."

"On the contrary, she's the idea victim. Twenty thousand shares.' Miles's voice was sardonic. He hac brought water and was bending ove Marcia.

He broke off with a little grunt o surprise. Carole saw his fingers slij down the front of Marcia's dress anc bring out a crumpled piece of paper

"What is it?" asked Mr. Barbe sharply.

Miles rose from the couch, smooth ing out the sheet.

The crinkled scrap of paper showed

JANUARY
2

The others were crowding around gazing in mute astonishment at th leaf from the calendar.

Peter glanced down at Marcia He exclaimed suddenly, "She's com ing to."

The dark head against the cushion was stirring. Marcia's eyes half opened

"What happened?" Miss Greg had sprung forward.

With an effort the girl pushed her self up against the cushions. Her lip parted in a faint smile. "I'm sorry. I was foolish of me to faint."

"Foolish!" echoed Miles. "M dear, you were half strangled."

Marcia's fingers moved slowly ove the dull red wales on the delicate ski of her neck. "But the trap on the doo was sprung. What . . . ?"

"Just a blind," exclaimed Peter "The door hadn't been opened."

"I see." Marcia's impassive gaz scrutinized each of them in turn. "S

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: *was* one of you six that tried to ill me."

"But you must be able to remem- er what happened," broke in Mr. owley.

"I remember what happened. Per- ectly." Marcia pushed the dark hair ack from her forehead. "But it won't elp."

"You haven't any idea who at- acked you?"

"None at all. You see, when — hen the water cooler crashed, I ran oward it. I don't know why. I sup- ose I had some crazy notion of try- ng to catch the murderer. Then I eard Mr. Howe telling us all to go ack to the lighted office. That made ie more sensible. I turned and started ack in this direction."

"Yes?" put in Miss Gregg.

"Then I felt a hand on my arm. It as quite a gentle grip. I felt myself eing drawn along." Marcia shrugged. I wasn't frightened. I thought it was robably Miles or someone taking me nder their wing. The hand dropped om my arm. It moved over my dress. efore I had time to realize it, both ands were closing around my throat." he gave a little shiver. "I tried to y out, but I couldn't. I remember umbling backward, feeling myself oking. That's all."

"But it must have been a man," rged Miss Gregg.

Marcia glanced at the treasurer uickly. "No, Miss Gregg; as I said, ie grip was very gentle at first. It — was never particularly violent. It ight just as well have been a woman." She was glancing at her watch. "Twenty-five minutes to nine," she said. "If Miss Thorne's right, the cleaning women will be here in about half an hour."

"Half an hour," said Peter suddenly. "I think it's about time we started to consider the really important question — which of us is doing all this. It's not exactly pleasant. But presumably the police will be in charge soon. Everything's going to be a lot simpler if — if we can get some points cleared up before they come.

"I suppose we all agree," continued Peter quietly, "that this terrible business concerns only stockholders and employees of Leland & Rowley. Whoever arranged this trap must have known everything about the office. I can't understand why Mr. Barber was included on that memorandum. But, as the representative of Pan-American Dye, he obviously has nothing to do with these — these crimes. I suggest we give him absolute authority and let him cross-examine us."

"Excellent." Miles brought lighter and cigarette together. "Of course, a lurid imagination could conjure up a case against Mr. Barber. Pan-American may have got cold feet about the merger and sent him over to murder us all." He grinned. "Still, I'll second Howe's recommendation."

Mr. Barber was gazing rather angrily at Miles. Apparently he was not used to being treated flippantly. "I agree with Mr. Howe," he said. "We

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should do our utmost to clear the dreadful matter up. And I think it should be fairly easy."

"Easy!" echoed Mr. Rowley.

Mr. Barber nodded. "We have to look for the criminal among those of you who stand to lose rather than gain by the merger."

Mr. Barber had the situation formidably under control now. His voice was sharp, unemotional. "If the murderer has so strong a feeling against the merger, it is reasonable to suppose that he voted against it. I should like to see the ballot slips. They may give us a clue."

"Not a bad idea," cut in Peter.

"They're in my office," offered Miss Gregg.

"Before anyone gets them," broke in Mr. Barber slowly, "I have another suggestion to make, one which we should already have thought of. The murderer took both the 2nd and 3rd of January from the calendar. We found the 2nd on Miss Leland. Presumably, this — this person is planning a third attack. If so, the calendar slip should still be in his possession. I suggest that each one of us should let himself be searched."

"Searched . . . ?" began Miss Gregg.

But she broke off at a strangled little exclamation from Mr. Rowley. He had half risen, his cheeks the color of cigarette ash. "I . . . someone . . . a glass . . . water . . ." he breathed hoarsely.

"Mr. Rowley!" Carole knew her ex-boss had a weak heart. She had seen an anginal attack like this only a week before, after Mr. Barber had come to the office to discuss the final arrangements for the merger. She hurried to the cooler, poured a cup of water, and crossed to Mr. Rowley.

Peter was already at his uncle's side.

"Pocket!" Mr. Rowley was whispering. "Right-hand pocket."

Peter's fingers slipped into his uncle's pocket. He produced a small ampoule and crushed it swiftly beneath Mr. Rowley's nostrils. Carole hovered close with the water. As she did so, she noticed, to her astonishment, that Peter was concealing something in his left hand — a small piece of paper. He saw her looking at it and shot her a warning glance.

"Give me the water, please, Carole," he said.

She passed him the cup. He tilted it to his uncle's lips. Then, swiftly, he slipped the crushed piece of paper into the empty cup and handed it back.

In one blinding second Carole realized what had happened. Peter had found the third calendar slip in his uncle's pocket; he was trying to conceal it, mutely asking her to help him protect Mr. Rowley.

The others were clustering around anxiously. The president's breathing was becoming more normal now. He forced a pallid smile. "So sorry," he muttered.

No one spoke for a long moment. Then Mr. Barber said, "I must ask all the men to empty their pockets. Perhaps, Miss Thorne, you'll look through the ladies' coats and handbags."

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The search seemed to take hours. At last Mr. Barber seemed satisfied. "He must have anticipated the fact that we would make a search, and disposed of the sheet from the calendar. Now, perhaps someone will get those ballot slips."

"I will." Hurriedly, Peter slipped his handkerchief, pen, and change back in his pocket. Casually he picked up the cardboard cup from the table where Carole had placed it.

"Perhaps you'll come with me, Miss Thorne," he said.

Carole knew what he wanted to tell her. "Yes," she said.

Miss Gregg's office was next to Peter's. Neither he nor Carole spoke as they hurried to it. Peter closed the door behind them. His gray eyes looked down at her seriously. "You guessed, Carole? I couldn't let Uncle see it. I was afraid the shock might be too much for him."

Slowly he pushed open the crushed cup and took out the piece of paper.

Staring up in that heavy, horribly familiar type was:

JANUARY
3

"You found it in Mr. Rowley's pocket?" Carole said dully.

He nodded.

"Peter, how awful. But how — how did it get there?"

"I suppose the murderer must have planted it on him." Peter's voice was hesitant. "But I don't see how Uncle . . ."

"You can't think Mr. Rowley was the one who took the sheets from the calendar?" cut in Carole suddenly.

Peter moistened his lips. "No, it's absolutely impossible for him to have done anything like that deliberately," he said softly. "But I have been worried about him — about his health. He hasn't been well for some time. The idea of the old company having to break up has been preying on his mind." He crushed the slip into his pocket. "Listen, Carole, you're his secretary. You're as close to him as anyone. Has he done anything at all strange lately?"

He broke off. Carole knew how beastly this must be for Peter — to have in his mind even the vaguest doubts about the bachelor uncle who had always been like a father to him. But, as she thought back over the hectic events of the past weeks, she felt a slow suspicion stirring in her.

"I hate to say this," she began impulsively. "But he — he has been rather odd lately. And then, just after Mr. Barber came here to the office the day before Christmas, he had a heart attack like the one he had tonight."

"Mr. Barber!" exclaimed Peter blankly.

"Yes. Just after Mr. Barber left, the buzzer went and I found your uncle doubled forward over the desk. He managed to tell me about the ampoule, and he was all right again in a few minutes. But I had a feeling he'd heard something that had given him a shock."

Peter's eyes were anxious. "That was the day Mr. Barber came round

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to discuss the final arrangements for the merger, wasn't it?"

"And it was the next day that Mr. Rowley started to have those long conferences with Mr. Whitfield."

"You don't know what they were talking about?"

"No. They kept the door shut. But this afternoon they sent for me to witness a signature and . . ." Carole paused. "Oh, Peter, I've just remembered. When I went in there this afternoon, Mr. Whitfield had borrowed my typewriter. He was sitting there — typing."

"Typing!"

They stood perfectly still, staring at each other. That memorandum. *Exit before midnight.* Had — had Mr. Rowley and Mr. Whitfield somehow compiled it together?

"What are we going to do, Peter?" Carole asked quietly.

"Whatever we think, it's only theory. We've got no proof." Peter's voice was taut. "Carole, we can't tell the others. It's not fair to Uncle, now that he's sick. The police will be here soon. If — if they find out anything, well, they find it out, but . . ."

"All right," murmured Carole.

Suddenly she felt terribly tired. Peter's fingers were still warm on her arm. She was very conscious of his nearness, of his comforting strength.

"New Year's Eve!" She looked up at him with a little grimace. "Just a few hours ago I was having my hair fixed and planning to dazzle you with my new black velvet."

He did not reply for a moment. The light gleamed down on his head. Slowly his arms went around her and drew her toward him. His lips met hers, warm, passionate. "Carole, darling," he whispered, "I know it's a crazy time to say it, but I've — I've got to tell you how crazy I am about you."

His hand moved caressingly over her soft blonde hair. "I guess I'm not used to explaining the way I feel. I'm not like Shenton and those fellows who know the phrases. It's — all evening, with all these ghastly things happening, I've just been able to think of you — of how I might have been alone with you . . ."

He broke off, gazing down at her, his gray eyes anxious, uncertain, like a boy's. "Carole, darling, will you marry me? I want you so much."

She let herself relax in his arms. Life with Peter would be so safe.

"Pardon a most untimely entrance." Carole spun round at the sound of a quiet voice behind her. Peter turned, too. They stood very close together, staring at the door. There, his hands in his trouser pockets, his dark, mocking eyes fixed on Carole's face, was Miles Shenton.

"I had no idea this remarkable evening was breeding romance."

Carole felt sudden anger. She hated him for coming in; hated him for staring at her with those insolently amused eyes, for being so — so disgustingly handsome.

Peter still had her fingers in his. He was glowering at Miles. "What did you come here for, Shenton?"

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"For the same reason as you, Howe. I was hoping for a little private talk with Miss Thorne. I wanted her to refresh my memory on a certain detail of our *tête-à-tête* here on Christmas Eve."

Carole felt the blood flooding her cheeks. How exactly like Miles to bring up Christmas Eve! She swung round to Peter. "Mr. Shenton was kind enough to ask me out to dinner on Christmas Eve," she explained acidly. "Unfortunately, he discovered at the last moment that he had a very important business engagement."

"Oh, I wasn't referring to that." Miles grinned. "I meant our little encounter here afterward." He glanced at Peter. "I happened to drop into the office around half-past ten that night. And who should appear but Miss Thorne herself? We had a very pleasand session together."

Pleasant session! Carole remembered vividly every moment of that pleasant session. When Miles had stood her up she had gone back to the office, after a solitary dinner, to retrieve some Christmas packages she had left behind. She had found him there, alone and in tails for his "business engagement." He had kissed her, made love to her. For some mad reason she had let him. And then he had suddenly broken away, saying, "*Well, Marcia Leland's waiting for me downstairs. A practically unemployed chemist can't afford to keep his potential meal ticket waiting.*"

The two men were gazing at each other.

"Your office is down at the laboratories," said Peter quietly. "What were you doing here at ten-thirty on Christmas Eve?"

"Robbing the safe." Miles's smile was less humorous than usual. "As a matter of fact, I was on a very innocent mission. That afternoon your uncle called me up at the laboratories. It was the first time, incidentally, that I'd heard about the merger. He wanted me to send him all the unpatented processes and the notebooks old Leland kindly but quite unprofitably bequeathed me in his will. I sent them up." He took out a cigarette. "As Miss Thorne told you, I had a business engagement. Marcia and I happened to be passing, and I wanted my notebooks back. So I came up here to get them. . . . But we seem to be wandering from the point I intended to bring up with Miss Thorne."

"There's no need to bring up any other points now," cut in Carole curtly. "We'd better be getting back to the others."

"Miss Thorne is probably right — as usual." Miles held his lighter to the cigarette. "As I remember, you two were sent here to collect the ballot slips. You seem to have become sidetracked from your original purpose." He crossed and picked up the ballot slips.

When they rejoined the others, Miles took the ballot slips to Mr. Barber. The executive from Pan-American Dye glanced through them, his eyes widening. "Well," he said briskly, "the murderer has voted in

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avor of the merger — presumably to vert suspicion. Every one of you resent in this room voted aye.

"But, even so," continued Mr. Barber's level voice, "I think we may easonably eliminate those of you hose interests are obviously bound p with the carrying of the merger." He glanced at Peter. "Mr. Howe is to ave a very remunerative position ith Pan-American. I fail to see how e could have the slightest motive for ommitting these crimes."

Mr. Barber's gaze shifted to Marcia. And Miss Leland, too. Even if she ad not been brutally attacked, she wns twenty thousand shares, and the erger will greatly enhance their alue."

Marcia inclined her head. "As a natter of fact, I'm very anxious for he merger to go through. I need the xtra capital badly. You see, I'm lanning to endow an institute for oncommercial research in — in memry of my father."

Mr. Barber's thick brows lowered s he glanced at Carole. "Miss Thorne, understand, is losing her job hrough the merger."

"It's absurd to suspect Miss Thorne," broke in Peter. "Besides, he has an alibi. When the trap on the oor was sprung, she was at the other nd of the office. You could tell that y the lighted taper."

"That is true," Mr. Barber said. We may eliminate Miss Thorne."

Suddenly Miss Gregg leaned forard in her chair. "There's no need to uspect me," she said calmly. "I know what some of you are thinking: Poor old Miss Gregg, who's been with the firm practically all her life — maybe she couldn't stand the idea of having to start all over again."

She snorted. "Well, you're wrong. The merger is going to treble the value of my shares; give me a big enough income so's I won't have to work any more. And I'm through with work. I want to have a good time."

She crossed her hands in her lap and looked around her defiantly. "You can cross me off, too."

Mr. Rowley had been listening with rather tense interest. Now he lifted a hand.

"As Miss Gregg has explained her point of view," began the president quietly, "I might as well explain mine. Some of you, I know, realize that my heart wasn't in the merger. Perhaps I was sentimental, but, with my old friend Nathaniel Leland, I started this firm — it meant everything to me. In the back of my mind I hoped that we would be able to struggle along without losing our corporate existence." He smiled faintly. "But that was only a sentiment. As a large stockholder I have as much to gain as anyone by the merger. Besides, like Miss Thorne, I have an alibi." He threw out his hands in a small gesture of finality. "Only my nephew, Peter Howe, knows this, knows why I could have no motive for interfering with something which no longer concerns me. Last week my doctors gave me less than three months to live. My alibi is — death."

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There ran through the group a spontaneous ripple of shocked and sympathetic comment. They lapsed into silence, until the sharp click of a lighter drew all attention to Miles. He was leaning back against the cushions of the couch, a faint trail of smoke issuing from his nostrils.

"I seem to be the only suspect left," he said. "I might as well save you all the trouble and give you the case against myself. The merger is removing my job. I happen to be in fairly desperate need of money. Mr. Leland, who was so generous to his other dependents, failed to be generous to his protégé. He left me no shares in his will, only a few and regrettably sketchy notes of the experiments he was working with at the time of his death. So I am the only one who has any kind of logical motive for committing murder to stop the merger from going through."

He grinned. "As defense, I merely state the fact that I did not murder Mr. Whitfield. I certainly did not attack Marcia, to whom I am very devoted. And my motive is not quite so strong as it appears, since Marcia has offered me a job with the proposed Leland Institute."

Carole felt an overpowering sense of relief. Of course, Miles didn't mean anything to her. But . . .

"So" — it was Miles's voice that broke in calmly — "we have proved that none of us has the slightest motive for inaugurating this mass exit before midnight."

"But," blustered Mr. Barber, "there must be some mistake. We've . . ."

"Why don't we give up being de tectives for the time being?" asked Miles. "Besides, I have a rather un easy suspicion which I feel I must share with you all." His eyes moved gravely to Carole. "Miss Thorne and I happened to meet here in the office on Christmas Eve — quite accidentally I might add. The time was about ten-thirty, and, I may be wrong, but I don't remember noticing any signs that the cleaning women had been here."

Carole stared at him, her eyes gradually widening. "You're right," she breathed.

Miles nodded. "From which I can draw only one conclusion: Christmas Eve was the day before a holiday. So is tonight. Scrubwomen don't put in an appearance on the eve of holidays. They won't come till tomorrow night."

Miss Gregg gave a little horrified gasp. "So — so we won't be let out! We *will* be here until midnight!"

"There is a chance — just a chance." Miles's cool voice broke in. "We can always revert to the most primitive method of attracting attention. *Fire.*"

"Fire?" echoed Mr. Barber. "How?"

"By making people in the street think the Moderna Tower is on fire. By having smoke pouring out of all the windows." Miles's face was very serious. "I've got a fairly workable plan. There are some samples of one of our specially processed dyes here in the office which smokes like hell when you set fire to it. Each of us gets

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a metal scrap basket stuffed with paper. Each of us takes a window. I've got some lighter fluid in my desk. We can make little individual bonfires and put up quite a convincing impression of fire."

"Yes. We could put the scrap baskets on the sills." It was Mr. Rowley speaking, quickly, excitedly. "There are seven rooms and just seven of us."

"But the darkness!" cut in Miss Gregg. "It means going out again — out there in the darkness."

"Leave that to the most stalwart of us, Miss Gregg." Miles rose. "You ladies can share the lighted offices."

The next ten minutes were hectic. Seven scrap baskets were stuffed with paper, sprinkled with the dye and lighter fluid.

Finally everything was ready. Marcia Leland was to stay behind to look after the window in Peter's room, while Miss Gregg was to take charge of her own lighted office. The rest of them started out in silence through the semidarkness.

Carole had been allotted the central window in the main office. She felt a little twinge of fear as the four men slipped away from her into the deeper obscurity, leaving her alone in that large, silent room. A faint shaft of illumination took the edge off the darkness. She moved toward the window, and pushed it up.

The snow was icy against her hands as she banked it up on the sides of the sill to make room for her scrap basket. She fumbled for a match in her box. Then she stiffened. From the darkness behind her had come the soft sound of footsteps.

She could hear soft breathing, feel the presence there behind her. For a second she could not move. Then she spun around blindly. "Who's . . . ?"

Her voice faded. An arm had slipped purposefully around her waist. She felt breath warm on her cheek and then lips pressing against hers. As soon as he touched her, she knew it was Miles. It was a strange, intoxicating sensation — part anger, part relief, part excitement.

Gradually his arms relaxed around her. He drew back. And with the moment of his moving away, she felt anger rising to swamp all other emotions. "Miles . . ."

"I had to kiss you to stop you from screaming."

"What are you doing here?"

"I thought it would be a good opportunity to have a talk with you."

"And what is there to talk about?"

"Your future." Miles twisted his warm fingers around hers. "Carole, you're not going to marry Howe, are you?"

"I shouldn't have thought it mattered to you what I did. There'll always be lots of other girls to neck in dark offices."

"Listen, Carole; you're being a fool and you know it." His arm had slipped around her again. His face, very close to hers, was dark, earnest. "Christmas Eve was all a mistake. I'd have explained it days ago if I'd ever realized what you were thinking. I went out with Marcia because she called me up

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to offer me this job with her Leland Institute. It was a business engagement. Heaven knows, there's nothing more emotional between Marcia and me than the mutual respect of two scientists and a brotherly-sisterly friendship — never has been.

"If you've got any sense, Carole, you know I'm crazy about you. I — well, when I heard about the merger I knew that my job was on the skids. I didn't exactly feel like asking you to be the wife of an unemployed chemist. But I'm going to have a job now with Marcia — a good one." He gripped her arms and gazed down at her. "You don't want to marry a stuffed shirt like Howe. You'd be bored in a week, and you know it. Of course, I'm not much of a catch. I don't inherit the Rowley fortune, like Howe, but — you'd have a better time with me, Carole. You'd have fun."

Still Carol could not speak.

He kissed her again almost fiercely. Then he gave a short laugh. "Two proposals in an evening — you *are* in demand." Abruptly he turned away. "Say, you haven't lit your bonfire yet."

While she stood there, breathless, he struck a match and bent over the scrap basket.

"Which just goes to show that you can't get on without me." He touched her arm. "Make up your mind, dimwit, and don't mess up your life."

She heard his footsteps growing fainter as he disappeared into the shadows. She was alone again. For a moment she stood still, her lips numbed by the harshness of his kisses, thinking dazedly of what he had said. He had explained Christmas Eve; his explanations were perfectly reasonable. Probably she had made a fool of herself. But — but could she believe him?

She wouldn't think about it now. She forced herself to concentrate on the moment. The paper in her scrap basket had been too closely packed, and the snow had dampened it. The flames which Miles had started were dwindling. She cupped her hand to shield them from the breeze. And, as she did so, she noticed her own name on one of the crushed sheets.

She looked more closely. It was her signature: *Carole Thorne*. And then, above it: *Samuel P. Whit . . .*

The flames shivered and died out.

Stooped as she was over the sill, she could see the smoke streaming from Mr. Rowley's office. She caught a glimpse of the president's pale, lined face bent over his scrap basket.

The snowflakes fell, crystal cold, against her face; the chill night air tugged at her hair. She could still see the smoke eddying slowly from the president's room.

And then, suddenly, the smoke curled crazily. She saw Mr. Rowley's scrap basket lurch forward, topple, and crash from the sill, falling like a miniature comet down the dark side of the tower. While she watched, her nerves tense, an arm was flung wildly out through the window next to her. Another arm. Then the figure of a man was poised there over the sill.

She screamed, but her voice seemed

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to dissolve without sound into the night air. The figure had jerked forward. She caught one blinding glimpse of Mr. Rowley's pale, distorted profile. His legs and arms were flaying helplessly. Then he too was hurtling downward, downward . . .

Carole never quite knew what happened next. Somehow, she found the others, told them of the dreadful thing she had seen. She remembered Peter's face, pale with shock. She remembered thinking, "Peter and I were wrong, then. That slip was in poor Mr. Rowley's pocket because he was the next victim — not the murderer."

They were all back again — a shaken, silent little group — in Peter's office.

After what seemed like hours, Mr. Barber was speaking again, his voice dry but with some semblance of composure. "Surely," he said, "this can't have happened without — without *anyone* seeing anything."

"Did you notice anything, Mr. Barber?" cut in Marcia Leland.

"I? Well, no. I was attending to my scrap basket and . . ."

"Exactly. We all were."

"But I still can't believe it," murmured Miss Gregg shakily. "Just before it happened we'd proved that none of us could be guilty."

Marcia looked up. "We'd only proved that none of us had a motive for wanting to stop the merger, Miss Gregg."

"That seems very much the same to me," said Miles.

"But it isn't." Marcia's voice was slow, deliberate. "We all benefit by the merger, and yet we know one of us has been committing these crimes. We must have been working on the wrong motive."

"But what other motive could there be?" asked Carole, perplexed.

Peter Howe glanced up, a faint, almost bitter smile on his lips. "In the case of my uncle's death I suppose I have the most obvious motive. It happens that I was terribly fond of him; he — he had always been like a father to me. But — well, so far as I know, I inherit his estate."

"But that isn't a motive, Peter," cut in Carole quickly. "No one could possibly believe you — you killed your uncle because you're his heir. We — all of us heard Mr. Rowley say that you, and only you, knew he was a dying man."

"Exactly," agreed Marcia Leland. "It's absurd to consider that. Besides, we've got to think of a motive that includes Mr. Whitfield's death, too." Her tranquil eyes stared straight in front of her. "If the merger and the memorandum really were an elaborate blind, it's obvious that the murderer had a reason for killing both Mr. Rowley and Mr. Whitfield. Miss Thorne tells us they had been having private conferences together lately. Mr. Whitfield tried to tell us something just before the lights went out and he was killed. Isn't it possible that they had found out something which had given the murderer a motive for having to kill them both?"

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"But you, Miss Leland," cut in Miss Gregg sharply. "You're forgetting you were attacked, too."

"But I wasn't killed. And if he'd really wanted to, the murderer could easily have killed me."

"So you think you were attacked to throw us off the scent?" asked Peter.

"I do. If the murderer had wanted to make us believe he was trying to kill off the major stockholders, I was the obvious person to attack."

Miles gave a low whistle. "Maybe you have got something, Marcia. Mr. Whitfield, Mr. Rowley, and those conferences!" He turned to Carole. "Do you have any idea what they were talking about?"

Carole shook her head. She outlined what she had already told Peter, how she had seen Mr. Whitfield typing a document when she had been called in that afternoon to witness a signature.

"Typing a document!" broke in Miles. "If there's anything in Marcia's theory, those papers would probably have something to do with it. Mr. Whitfield didn't go back to his office before the stockholders' meeting, did he?"

"Why — no."

"Then the documents are probably still in his briefcase."

Miles dashed out of the room, only to return a few seconds later. He was gripping the lawyer's briefcase in his hand. He shrugged. "False alarm. It's empty."

"Empty?" echoed Carole, glancing at him doubtfully. "But — but I know there were important papers in it. Mr. Whitfield forgot it and left it on my desk. He came out of the stockholders' meeting especially to get it."

Marcia Leland exclaimed, "Then we are on the right track. Don't you see? Mr. Whitfield and Mr. Rowley must have been killed because of those papers. And the murderer's stolen them."

"Stolen them? But . . ."

"Of course," exclaimed Peter. "That's what must have given Mr. Whitfield the clue. When we were all discussing the memorandum, I remember now that he was moving the zipper on his briefcase to and fro. He must suddenly have noticed the papers were gone and connected up the theft with the murder threat."

"Wait a moment," broke in Carole. "Mr. Rowley had a heart attack last week just after you'd been to see him, Mr. Barber. I had a feeling then that something you'd said had given him a shock. What did you talk about?"

Mr. Barber looked rather flustered. "I — er — I merely came around to discuss a certain aspect of the merger."

"What aspect?" demanded Peter.

"As a matter of fact, it concerned the unpatented processes which had been turned over to our company with your patents, trademarks, and other official documents. Our head chemist was very much excited about certain of them. He asked me to make sure from Mr. Rowley that by the

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terms of the merger they were to become the property of the Pan-American Dye Combine. Mr. Rowley assured me that they were."

"Unpatented processes?" Peter's face was blank. "But — Shenton is Leland & Rowley's head chemist. He can tell you we didn't have any unpatented processes that were valuable."

Miles nodded. "Howe's right."

Mr. Barber looked even more agitated. "I do not understand. Of course, I am no chemist myself. But I was assured that certain processes for the artificial manufacture of aniline derivatives of indigo, which Mr. Leland left at the time of his death, were extremely valuable."

"But — but the notes for those processes were left to Shenton personally," persisted Peter. "And they were worthless."

"That's so," agreed Miles. "Mr. Leland hadn't finished them."

"We must be talking at cross-purposes," spluttered Mr. Barber. "Our head chemist had seen the processes himself. He told me they had been worked out down to the last detail."

Marcia Leland rose, her cheeks flushed.

"I always thought so," she exclaimed. "Just before he died in Florida, Father was working desperately to get his results down on paper. I know Father. He'd never have given in until he'd finished his job." She turned to Miles. "Don't you see what happened? Father *did* complete his experiments. We always thought it was strange he'd left you nothing in his will. He'd actually left you the records of his most important and revolutionary work."

"And —?"

"And you received only the few useless notebooks, because someone stole the ones that had the valuable data in them."

Mr. Barber cut in crisply: "They must obviously have been taken by someone in Leland & Rowley's who was financially interested in the merger going through; someone who knew the firm was losing ground; who knew our company would never consent to a favorable merger unless we were offered those particular processes as an additional inducement."

"That makes sense," added Peter slowly. "Uncle must have realized something was wrong after Mr. Barber had brought up the subject of the unpatented processes on Christmas Eve."

"And that's why he called me that same day and asked to see the notebooks I had down at the lab," added Miles. "He figured out what had happened. He discussed it with Mr. Whitfield —"

"And that was why they were murdered," broke in Miss Gregg, her face creased with dawning understanding. "Because they were the only ones who knew there'd been a fraud."

Since Marcia's initial suggestion, developments had followed one another so quickly that they were all left breathless. Peter was the first to speak again:

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"But if my uncle knew about the theft of the processes, why didn't he realize they were the real motive behind the murder threat? Why didn't he tell us we were on the wrong track as soon as Mr. Whitfield was killed?"

"Probably because the murderer had gone to a great deal of trouble to fool him," explained Marcia. "Perhaps that was the real reason why I was attacked, why the murderer used that theatrical device of the calendar slips. It was partly to confuse all of us, but mostly to throw Mr. Rowley off."

"But where does that get us?" Miles lit a cigarette a trifle too jauntily. "Presumably, it eliminates me. I would hardly have stolen processes which were legally my own. But, so far as I can see, any one of you could have taken them when Mr. Rowley brought them back from Florida."

"But how could an unscientific layman have realized the value of the processes?" asked Mr. Barber.

"Anyone who knew Mr. Leland could have made a shrewd guess that they'd be commercially profitable." Miles looked from one face to the other. "I wonder which of you did pull that particularly dirty trick on me." He glanced at the treasurer. "It would have taken a keen financial mind like Miss Gregg's to realize how those processes would increase the value of her stock holdings." His eyes moved to Marcia. "Or an earnest young physicist who wanted money for pure, noncommercial research. Or" — his ironic gaze rested on Peter — "a farsighted and ambitious young executive like Howe. One might build up a very good case against Miss Thorne, too, who, as Mr. Rowley's secretary, had easiest access to the papers and who, as the prospective wife of one of the people financially involved, had a motive." He was looking at Mr. Barber now. "The case against you, Mr. Barber, is obvious. Those processes are going to make you and your company even more famous and prosperous."

"Supposing we stick to facts," snapped Mr. Barber. He turned to Carole. "That paper you say you saw Mr. Whitfield typing — is there any way we could find out what was in it?"

Carole looked up quickly. "There's just a chance. I rather think Mr. Whitfield was using a carbon. If so, the copy may be in Mr. Rowley's private safe. The murderer couldn't have taken it, too, because I'm the only person who knows the combination."

Peter rose. "Come on, Carole. Barber and I will go with you and have a look."

Carole followed the two men to the door, and together they hurried through the main office back to Mr. Rowley's room. Carole's fingers were trembling as she spun the handle of the safe.

The door swung open. Peter's flickering match gleamed on a single sheet of paper. "Looks as though you're right, Carole." He took the paper out, and the three of them hurried back to the others.

The room was absolutely quiet as

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Peter crossed to the window and stood there, bending over the document.

"Well," asked Mr. Barber, "what is it?"

"I'll let you see it for yourself in a moment." Peter's voice was dangerously quiet. "For the time being, I'd rather not name names — because I think this paper explains who took the processes and exactly who is responsible for what has been happening tonight." His level gaze moved around the little group. "We were right. The motive did lie in those discoveries of Mr. Leland's. Someone did turn them over to Pan-American Dye to insure our getting good terms on the merger. I believe I can guess who that person was."

"You mean . . . ?" breathed Carole.

Peter glanced at her almost apologetically. "I hate even to have to think this. But I believe my uncle was the man who took those processes."

"Mr. Rowley?"

"And I think I can understand the way he would have felt. Ever since Mr. Leland's death, the company had been slipping. Uncle realized that. He would also have realized that there was only one way by which he could possibly save the interests of the stockholders. That was by exploiting those processes."

His words were followed by a flat silence.

At length Marcia said, "Do you mean that paper is a confession? Surely, Mr. Rowley couldn't possibly have killed Mr. Whitfield and then committed suicide."

"Of course not. My uncle wasn't a murderer." Peter tapped the paper in his hand. "But this document gives us a clue which would explain the murder of both Mr. Whitfield and my uncle. Suppose someone found out what Uncle had done and planned to blackmail him. Suppose that person went to Uncle, told him that he would expose him if he didn't change his will and leave all his property to him. Uncle was in a very nervous, overstrained condition. It would have been easy to scare him. Suppose he did agree to change his will in favor of this extortionist and brought Mr. Whitfield in to draw it up.

"Suppose, then, that this person was satisfied that Uncle had changed his will. He would have known that it was very unlikely that Uncle would have let the will stand that way indefinitely. If he was going to get Uncle's money, he would have to act quickly — and kill him before he changed his mind. He realized he had a perfect opportunity to shield his real motive behind the merger. He wrote that crazy note; he got us here, planning to kill Uncle and throw us off the scent. But Mr. Whitfield, as Uncle's lawyer, knew about the will. Tonight he guessed about the blackmail." Peter shrugged. "He had to be killed, too."

"But are you actually accusing someone?" cut in Mr. Barber.

"I am. I'm accusing the person who

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is named in this document." Very slowly, Peter crossed and handed Mr. Barber the paper they had found in the safe. "Perhaps you'd like to read it out," he said.

The representative of Pan-American Dye bent over the document. When he looked up, his expression was very stern. "This," he said, "is the copy of a short will drawn up this afternoon in which Mr. Rowley bequeaths his entire estate to one person."

His bushy-browed eyes fixed on Miles. "Mr. Shenton, I presume you know that you are Mr. Rowley's sole heir."

The others turned sharply to Miles.

"No," he murmured. "I wasn't aware of it. But I'm grateful for the information. I'm also grateful for Mr. Howe's implied information that I'm both a blackmailer and a murderer." His eyes moved with sardonic hostility to Peter. "But I'm rather confused on one point, Howe. Since those processes were legally my own — why wouldn't it have been simpler for me to take legal steps to recover them from your uncle instead of descending to extortion and — extermination?"

Peter moved, so that he stood in front of the other man. "Because you didn't find out what had happened until after the processes had been shown to the Pan-American chemists. You were shrewd enough to realize that, since they were unpatented, their value to you was considerably lessened."

"Ingenious and rather ingenuous," drawled Miles, rising to his feet. "But not so ingenuous as you're trying to make me out to be. Perhaps you can explain why I should have gone to the risk and trouble of murdering your uncle for my inheritance — when I only had to wait three months for it."

"For all you knew, you might have had to wait for years." Peter's voice was ominously low. "Everyone in this room heard Uncle say that no one except myself knew he was a dying man."

In the silence that followed, Carole stared at the two men: Peter, large, unshaken, and unshakable; Miles, lithe and studiedly casual. She was struggling with the confused speculations that swirled in her brain. Then, suddenly, one single thought emerged from the confusion to banish all others.

Before she had realized what she was doing, she had risen to her feet. "Wait a moment, Peter. You've got to let me say something." She moistened her lips. "It — it sounds crazy to bring my own private life into this, but I see now that it's all linked up with what's been going on. Tonight" — her voice sounded very remote — "two men asked me to marry them. I'm afraid I was conceited enough to think both of them had been overwhelmed by my brains or my beauty, or both. But I was wrong. One of them, I believe, was quite sincere. At least, I — I hope so. But the other — the other asked me to marry him because he's afraid of me.

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"One of those men," she went on, "did arrange this trap; he did write that mad memorandum to throw us off the scent because he wanted to kill Mr. Rowley and Mr. Whitfield — the two people who knew about the stolen processes. But there was someone else who had to be reckoned with: Mr. Rowley's private secretary."

Her fingers gripped tightly to the back of her chair. "How could he be sure she hadn't overheard something damning during those conferences?"

She laughed rather bitterly. "Being a gallant gentleman, he didn't actually murder her. He made love to her, presumably on the theory that her dumb head would be so turned that she wouldn't know whether she was coming or going."

Her eyes flashed sparks of amber as she gazed from Peter to Miles. "The funny part of it is, he needn't have bothered to try and fool me. I didn't know anything about the stolen processes or the new will; I was utterly harmless. But I'm not so harmless now. And I'm going to be perfectly shameless, too. I'm going to trot out something that all girls have to trot out at some stage of their careers — feminine intuition. Both those men kissed me tonight, and my feminine intuition's just getting around to realizing which of them kissed me because he meant it."

She broke off, looking rather wildly at the tense faces in front of her. "And I've got something more tangible than kisses and intuition to offer. We know the murderer, my prospective husband, stole those documents from Mr. Whitfield's briefcase. Well, he thinks he's destroyed them. He was very smart, he stuffed them in with the rest of the paper in my scrap basket and took it for granted I'd burn them. But I'm a very poor fireman. I let my fire go out and I noticed my signature there — on a document. That was the paper I was called into Mr. Rowley's office this afternoon to sign."

There was a crooked smile on her lips. "I rather think," she said, "that we'll find what we want in that scrap basket."

Impulsively she turned and ran out into the darkened main office. She could hear exclamations, shouts from the others. Vaguely she was aware of hurrying footsteps, following her. But she was blind to all thoughts of her own danger now, carried away by a burning indignation against the man who had made a fool of her. She hurried on, stumbling against desks and chairs. At last she reached the window. Swiftly she snatched up the scrap basket and slammed down the sash.

As she did so, she felt herself gripped from behind. She spun around, dropping the basket, and started to struggle, beating with her fists at the face of her invisible assailant. But the steel strength of the arms around her relentlessly pushed her backward — back against the closed window.

She tried to scream, but a stifling

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hand was pressed over her mouth. There was a mocking tinkle of glass; a gust of snowy air rushed in through the broken pane. Although she fought desperately to keep her balance, she felt her feet losing hold of the floor.

And then, suddenly, miraculously, the viselike grip loosened. She felt herself being jerked forward away from the window. As she staggered against a desk for support, she realized that another shadow had loomed out of the darkness just in time to save her. Ahead of her, there in the obscurity, two men were fighting.

Everything began to blur. She heard the dull impact of a blow, a little cry, and a heavy thud as one of the men stumbled to the floor. That was the last thing she knew before she lost consciousness.

When she came to, Carole was lying on the couch in the lighted office. She turned her head. A man was bending over her.

"Nothing serious, darling," he was saying softly. "Only a cute little cut here and there where your gentleman friend tried to throw you out of the window with the scrap basket."

"But what . . . ?"

"It's all over now." The mockery in Miles Shenton's eyes had changed to tenderness. He sat down on the edge of the couch, his fingers slipping over hers. "Quite a close shave, Carole. He knew you'd figured out the solution and he knew the game would be up if we found those papers from Mr. Whitfield's briefcase which he had hidden in your scrap basket. I think he was just about desperate enough to have thrown you out of the window. But luckily my unpredictable left hook was in form."

Painfully Carole pushed herself up against the cushions. She looked around her. Marcia Leland and Miss Gregg were standing together by the desk, gazing solemnly down, while Mr. Barber, with pieces of stout cord, trussed the unconscious figure of Peter Howe.

"You were one hundred per cent right," Miles was saying. "We've got all the evidence the police'll need from the papers in the scrap basket. One was the signed copy of Mr. Rowley's new will, rather charred but quite legal. The other was a personal note to me explaining exactly what kind of a skunk his nephew is."

"So — so it was Peter himself who stole those processes when he and Mr. Rowley went down to Florida."

"Exactly. And it was Howe who showed them to the chemist at Pan-American and made sure the merger would involve a fat job for himself. Mr. Rowley knew nothing about it until Mr. Barber came around, in all innocence, the day before Christmas to talk about the unpatented processes. Rowley realized then what had happened. But Pan-American had already seen the processes, and the damage was done. I imagine he'd have exposed Howe if he hadn't known he was, himself a dying man. That gave him the opportunity to make amends to me without having to drag the family name in the mud. This after-

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noon he made that new will cutting Peter out in my favor.

"It's easy to see why Howe arranged this elaborate exit-before-midnight party," Miles went on. "He found out about the new will and realized Mr. Whitfield wouldn't be going back to his own office before the stockholders' meeting. If he could destroy the new will and murder his uncle and the lawyer before anyone else knew about the will, the old one in his favor would still be valid. He'd also have killed off the only two people who knew he was a thief."

"And the stockholders' meeting gave him the ideal opportunity."

"Of course. We all knew he had everything to gain by the merger. But his uncle knew he was a thief; that's why he had to build up such an elaborate bluff. The attack on Marcia, the calendar slips, were used as false trails to throw Mr. Rowley off the scent and fool him into believing there really was an imaginary bogeyman who was determined to stop the merger. At first he probably hoped we would think it was all being done by some crazy maniac who kept coming in and out of the firetower door. But my burglar alarm spoiled that and he had to change his tactics. Which he did admirably. He was the first to point out that the murderer was one of us."

"It was incredibly clever," said Carole.

"Horribly. And I really believe he'd have got away with it if there hadn't been a carbon copy of the will in the safe, where he couldn't get at it and — if you'd been a better stoker."

"If my feminine intuition hadn't been dampened by Christmas Eve," murmured Carole, "he wouldn't have got away with as much as he did. I should have realized he was putting that calendar slip into his uncle's pocket instead of taking it out. I should have guessed when he kissed me that he was less interested in me than in finding out just how much I knew."

Her nose crinkled delightfully. "The whole thing only seeped through my thick skull when he accused Mr. Rowley of stealing the processes and tried to get too smart by turning that will into a case against you."

Miles leaned over and kissed her hair. "Darling, I'll never forget how gorgeous you looked when you went into that denunciation. A blonde fury. But I wasn't listening to a word you said — not after you'd hinted that one of your two prospective husbands wasn't repulsive to you. Carole, did you really mean that?"

She glanced up at him, her eyes smiling. "Dim-wit," she said.

The others were moving over to their side now.

Mr. Barber gazed down at her, his face grave and worried. "I'm glad to see you are all right again, Miss Thorne. This is terrible — terrible. But there is no question about Howe's guilt. I am sure, too, that he hoodwinked our chemist at Pan-American. I know he would never have been party to a fraud." The bushy-

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browed eyes turned to Miles. "Well, Mr. Shenton, we always have a vacancy at Pan-American for a man of your caliber."

"No, Mr. Barber," broke in Marcia's soft voice. "Mr. Shenton has promised to work with me, and you're not going to lure him away." There was a twinkle in her clear green eyes as she turned to Carole. "I warn you, Miss Thorne, I'm going to get all the work out of him I can — and as much of his money as possible for the Leland Institute."

Miles groaned. "So I'm going to be a meal ticket for two unscrupulous women."

Marcia glanced at her watch. "Almost midnight. Any second now the merger will go through — and the New Year begins."

As she spoke, there was a faint sound — a sound coming from somewhere outside in the darkness.

"It's somebody singing," exclaimed Miss Gregg weakly.

"'*Sweet Adeline*'!" cried Miles. "The night watchman!"

They all dashed out into the main office, ran to the door to the fire stairs and started to bang wildly. There was no mistaking it now. The singing drew nearer.

And then, as they stood there, another sound joined in the chorus of *Sweet Adeline*. From forty floors below in the streets of New York came a distant throbbing, the blaring of myriad car horns and toy trumpets, welcoming in the New Year. Somewhere a clock boomed out the opening chime of midnight.

With one hand Miles was beating on the door. The other arm was around Carole's waist. Very gently, his lips met hers. "Happy New Year, darling," he whispered. "After all this, we deserve it."

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